PRELUDE

Happy book, to be born
like this from circumstance, me
at the wheel of industry, waiting
to turn, waiting

as the gears shine by
on grease, as the belts lace
over rollers, dragging
packages. Take

or make a book, the choice
is obvious, like moonlight
on a sleeping bird’s
red and black

tattered wing. Book,
smile to be born, here on the brink
of desperation, flesh and soul,
hugging too many machines, deafened

by the banging of great
metal drums, blinded by the blur
of boxes, tubs, rolls of textiles
and other objects of commerce rolling by.

I.
PSEUDOPOD

PSEUDOPOD

My hair feels wet against the steel girder that I know
is blue, covered in a splatter of brown spots of rust:
the enamel paint has flaked, not taken
any holes with it. City drumming in the ballast, in my skull—
my neck hums to my shoulders, wants to pitch the face.
My expression: damp and grime—water bouncing off from planks,
beams, slickers and itself. The dark is full of dirty things,
will hurt itself, here near the earth: be tramped through
by the tony, the wretched who can't taste yet,
just above the lip, that they have once more
been abandoned. The woman with her handbag full
of books, teasing the hiding
child: *on, on, laggard, on to where you wish to rest*.
Storm
soils itself with mineral, in deeds, mud
most of all human. Leaks, and falls, underneath
throbbing eyes, prayers beneath a bit of sun. Why
explode to bleed whatever cloud created me?
Near the edge,
concrete falls to gravel tracks, another platform—
man, with cell-phone. Chin thrust up, a cigarette
pinched between his thumb and middle finger (style
taken in pretense, and worn like skin and yet—) a soul
with its perception near the flesh: moving mouth,
surprise widening the eyes, longing burning cheeks
with the arson of the blood. Soul
snaps the face down, head, skull into heart
to make sensation sensible. Soul,
drown that man with pride
and help the wind. And mine, surge into the metal beam
that hoists this concrete awning over us—to what, soul:
be an avenue? A garbage truck? A carpet
thick with sugar in a video arcade?
Are you hoping
that my waking breaks, and caught unawares, my hull
will be shaken—limb from body—by ten miles of soldered metal
grinding, sparking, groaning underneath the public train?

Even with my ears hunched to my shoulders, my fists
jammed in my pockets, I am feeding you: the stench
of water mingling with the night, massaging vitamins

into the softened hulls of seeds, oil in purple slicks
on the swooping wings of geese, neon
hummed luminous with voltage. You reek of bees: pollen, wax,
honey dripping from their chitin skates. You mock
all senses, bring the train and take whatever bodies manage to lurch into it.

BACK ROAD

It comes from the river: the stink
of bleach, chlorine, base, prying open the locked
leaves of the oaks and maples by the concrete bridge
decaying, looking like dough with hunks
of apple in it between two squat pillars
engraved with the duplicated date: 1936.
The lawns are cropped close near

new houses in a style a century old,
and the small farms, rolling acres
of corn, of six-inch pines, of hills
of apple trees and roads leading uphill
to a commercial blueberry patch.
In the trees leaning shawls over the road

with branches casting shadows
and their upper surfaces glaring green
at the hazy sun, no bird twitches. No animal
at all apparent except the coiled
brown fur body of an unknown thing
at the roadside. I think of murderers

emotionless with open bodies eviscerated
to expose the inner workings, who see all
other creatures as machines. No human
at the railroad tracks that open

at each side, driving straight
into a distance passed too quickly
to be plumbed. I remember shivering,
covering my body with my arms while the teacher
told me to relax, two dozen boys

half-naked, naked, snapping
towels at each other's asses, easy
in their skin. These new paths
and I a passenger, my mother
looking at each house she'd never
have. the dogs, one on my lap,

the other in the back, panting
excitedly, their small tongues
darting in and out. I've lost
ten years, and years are speeding by,
barns, and churches, abandoned antique shops

and cemeteries: a ten-foot angel
of blue metal in the billows of it constant robes
before a slab of plain gray marble—

the stiller that I become, standing absolutely
still, the great spilling whirl of galaxies
attacks me, mocks my fear with puzzles, children

dancing in a moonless night with sparklers, writing
nonsense, calligraphy
in white neon—
what we were, all being but a pinprick
in an instant, perhaps beginning was

the final instant of a universe before
collapsing on itself—
but not
this time. The clouds of galaxies spread out
from creation
with no center, edge or end—
though certainly there was one place, smaller than an atom
where—
no matter. Wherever
everything is, its growing outward, far apart—
and like my life, is speeding up. Here

I am, having cleaned the drains, smelling
something sickening but not exactly knowing
where it came from. Maybe something
died within the walls, or in another apartment.
There was no stench, forgive me, in those tiny
country rivers. Just the air around
my contemplation and my pen.

A MAN, 73, FEEDS A PIGEON A FRENCH FRY FROM A BENCH IN BRIDGEPORT, CT SUMMER 2002

Startled into speech, the muscles twitch, the bones
then go along with them, dragging the feathers, the air
pulls and pushes through the filaments: the pigeon's
eye has caught a flickering motion to the right
and without knowing why has jerked free from its spastic inertia
into the open space opposite. Bird whose breastplate
shines with gem, violet and pink, as if the drab
pigments sprinkled on the seal-gray grouse had been
brushed with shellac into a wet , clear sheen,

I saw the bird, the filthy city rats with wings. I saw
its reputation as it pecked for scraps, the eyes
like fresh, unbroken beads of blood. I don't
believe a word that I have heard in what now
seems a hundred years. A war's a boy
dressed in pantaloons, wielding a scimitar, a patch
over one eye that lies beneath, safe in the dark
to blink at other things, a boy who turns

and finds his hands are bloody and his grip
is tight around the neck of some tanned boy
that he would rather kiss. If he turns back,
averts his face as he completes the kill, his face
a fist of muscles—I could watch him, too. The hero
with a face of pew, someone disposing of a mouse
that stinks of soulless meat and whisker. Rotten pellet
to be thrown into a heap. But there's this neck:

electric murmurings of heart beyond a pump, that runs
all up and down the body: fern etched in limestone: we are
all mirrors of the maps we make of where we came. We should
know better than to recreate the rotten limb
that replicates while trunk to root the system's
dying. Let us bless ourselves with the humility
of birds. We are bright, winged things, here

because, despite our bones, we can be lifted up
from what is fast and tangled in its movements, what is fanged—
let's be like dinosaurs, not cremated, blown away, in one great flash,
but in perfecting what we are we lose our appetite for grace,
and see, everywhere we wheel, the silhouettes of birds,
from fathoms off, beyond our calls, we cannot discern

that we are everywhere, disguised in manifold costume,
hiding from ourselves, just at the cusp of sentience. We

we make lousy apes, and what we have done with our brains
and thumbs is less than what a decent ape would do.

PAPER

We had a deal, you scumbag bitch. I
would give you everything, and in return
you'd startle me through time and bring
surprises for the king in me: gold wings

on sapphire tigers, ivory soldiers with brass mechanisms,
antelopes in snow, a love beyond an awkward
glance. Now, here I am, my hair
entangled in a clockwork that I can't

understand, I am more scar
than skin, and dull beneath stampeding
days. I wanted your clean white body
and the secrets of your flesh, I wanted to undo

the tattoos and the paint, suck the ink,
poison and indigo, to be reminded that I lived
and did not die so totally in youth. I don't
trust you anymore. You have never told

a lie I did not cry after with pleas and bribes,
the fawning of a pauper fool. And who needs truth?
You never did, and I recoil from it,
am lacerated by the heartbeat and the heartbeat

after it. Take the sun from me, the moon
in all its grimy shining. Take the north
and morning star. I hear them when I rise:
"Transform me, man, and make a thing of me,

a piece, a prop, a bauble for the ages to consider…"
And I ignore them. As if by keeping silent
the shy and timid souls I scare off might
reconsider me, and come to my turned hand,

slowly turning to a cup for them to drink from,
where I might share with them the prisoner
of water, grinding nothing into grit between my fingers.
See what I have caught for you? The great

cold rain for you to taste the perfect clouds.
But who to give it to? My heart is always

manifold and full of foolish choices. No one waits
but you, here beneath my hands. And here we are again.

I take everything you bring to me and praise your grace.

DOG SLED

The bad dog leaps to hurt his master's whip. Embryonic
crystals following gravity down. The river
cracks, the whip cracks, and the wind grabs every bare branch
and shakes them free of snow. The sled won't go,
he could build a fire and roast his curs on it,

could give up, give the water something hot to eat—
the smoke won't swallow all the neon blue the sky would be
if it wasn't darkening. The twilight is eating up the man,
feet first, and can't untangle him from drive, drive
forward to the fire. There are so few deities

of snow, the driving sleet must be a Lucifer
of shards. There, in the black eyes of the dogsled driver,
see yourself, staring back at him. You hate
what he has done to dogs, see the red gash
steaming, and the muscles black with bleeding

fill with fur. What will you do for him, there
with his fur coat fringed with dead seals' wails?
He is of memory, like you. Would you make a poem
of him, would you take a scabbard of icicle and break
his head open for his team to feast from the smoking

bowl of brain and bone? He cannot see you in the light,
you who are reading him. He has been alone,
a pale pink monkey screaming "Mush!" His shadow
lies down, trapped under his feet, against the violet
featureless body of the field. The dogs

are all he has to move, his feet can't fool the drifts.
He has to fear the dark, it would crack off his lips
and leave his ivory-worn teeth to ache
against the moaning wind. What will you do with him? Would you
push him toward the river with its shining

skin? The huge, snaking body of the dancer
lying in the mangled havoc of its banks? The birch
and pine don't like the dance, and stand back shivering. They drink
the dancer and they think nothing of the night. The crows
have a stake in this, why not give them each a beast

to carry off, to feast on as they freeze? Stay
very still. Watch as their white breath
breaks apart, condensing on their long snouts
and their electric eyes. Stand there and wait, nothing can hurt you.
The black eyes blink, and you are watching as the eyes

close, or are you now the missing one? When those eyelids droop,
will you, too, now, be nothing in the wind? A sound
like sheep that mill about the highest branch,
a glimmer in the high clouds speeding at the mountains—
auroras? A moon beam, searchlight or a meteorite

dissolving in a flash? Who brought you here
to die? Who left you? You could have had the dogs,
made prison love to the sledman on the huddled hounds. Who
left you here, to freeze, to shimmer from your skin,
who left you here to see, and always see, invisible

and unheard in the dusk? Thank you for following.

SAPIENS

Everything is seabed to your ancient eye,
ghost hauling your nets in, reed and sinew, and the spear,
sentry among the smokestacks of the factories,
pizzerias, gas-stations and Laundromats—
the crabs and clams seem happy, cutting up your feet,

and the scallops have a hundred bright blue eyes.
In the writhing strips, teeming shells gape open, smiling
at you standing in the water of a naked life,
a water, warm and blue, bristling with oxygen.
Wood catches fire too easily but then your son will

trap its smoldering until your return,
in a cage, a ring of stones. Your sea is full of sharks
that are mouthed mountains with spotted skins of teeth—
the shallows are for men to drudge. In the crags,
the bones of dragons bleach, washed free

by rain dripping from the mountain, and the delta's
silt is full of teeth the size of hands. The fish
breaks, sizzling into frail white feathers
with strands of brown flesh threaded in them.
A meal's a thing to gobble down with dirty hands,

the salt won't cure the meat and keep it
from the sun and flies it draws up from the skin.
You drape the dead in cloaks of bone and shell,
orange blossoms in season and the living
gorge the later fruit. Only an animal would leave

its quiet woman to the rain. Goodbye, old sport,
I wish that we could sit and chat, or that I could share a knife of stone
and whittle gods with you, but you would run from me,
and I from you if we could meet. I fear
what you see, too...the sea black, surrounded
by the rusting dockyards and the heaps
of refuse, scourged by gulls. The great latticed drums,
the cars, the clouds of smoke. I'll spare you
the nightmare we call fission. Go home

to your kid and share a feast for me.

CONSTELLATION

The rumble of the traffic fools the wind. Above
the churches and the temples, the winter birds—what are they?
flicker in chevrons nowhere warm. The city children

walk alone, or in pairs, up the sandy streets
left by warm days that took the snow away.
The cabs and week-end workers

pace the main street and a lone dog barks.
Hung on the streetlamps, a hundred bright white electric
snowflakes climb the hill. The new year came

and left me weakened in its light. Moon,
why won’t you glow for me above these old abodes?
Are you so busy with the ocean and the blood

of men? Tugging at the women
until they bleed for you? Make me
wild again, take these pills, these bones, my age

and throw me to the stars. Oh, to float there
with the starlings and the ruby-throated oriole,
to the maps of scorpions and rams, pin me up and strip

my skin away until I am the night and ten flickering
flint-knapped flakes of night. Let young men look to me
for guidance as they stumble home.

FOR A SOLDIER DYING WITH NO GOD

The sun has seen your father: follow him. Shiver,
shimmer from your skin, roll above the desert, rings
of radiance from the point of entry of an arrowhead
into unmoving water. Bodiless one, I will give you

what I can. Touch these trinkets, think of them
down where we are weeping for you. A harlot's
greasy kiss, slippers of woven reed and leather,
a herringbone linen. We will never know of your hegira

into twilight, dusk and darkness, the sun's plummeting
under limestone quarries. We will never hear your footsteps
growing louder, fading, nor see the imprint of your signet
on the naked paper bleeding with your hand. Oh,

my silent brother, look at you. The rags
of shadow wrapping your black eyes, petals
of flesh above the smoking bone, your fingers twitching
at an enemy, a horsefly, tensing to flick

the tears from your torn cheek to keep the salt
from seeping into your wounds. I have nothing left to give you
but the moon, shining in your footsteps as it follows you,
takes your agony in its wide mouth and coos you quiet.

We will whisper lies to you while you still hear,
what can we do? The starved hawks circle and your unclaimed
carcass draws scavengers, lies prone to desert goddesses:
Astarte, Ishtar, Isis, Hathor, Bastet with her rattle

maddening the portals, all descending, lions flying, jaws
and gullets constricting over the glaring dunes, eager to gobble
your comrades, to gnaw your bones, to leave nothing
but your ribcage for scarabs to dance in, and leopards

to pet. Tenement of asps. You do not listen, stare
into the slit eyes of the cobra. Your soul is hauled off

on the back of the jackal, assassin of canticles: suckle
his ears as he carries you off, let your self be twined

in spells and incantations by the scorpions: they
will tell your name to no one. Turning back, the jackal
will open your mouth with his snout and blow. Let him
slip you into the river in the sharp reflection of the morning star
wrapped in the parchment of your instructions. Baboons
screech the sun’s arrival. Laugh, and follow him.

SILKIE

“It is really extraordinary how many poets, when feeling thoroughly low-spirited, revert to childhood and think of going out into the wilder parts of the world and building a tiny, tiny house JUST TO SHOW HOW MUCH I HATE YOU ALL, and how constantly they choose to be near large sheets of water. Not to drink, or to wash in, but just to give them that nice melancholy feeling that eighteenth—or early nineteenth century anthology lyricists used to get more directly by crawling about in country graveyards.”
A Pamphlet Against Anthologies, pp. 118-119, Laura Riding & Robert Graves, AMS Press, New York, 1970

Waves rolling, hillocks of green with hems of white
exploding on the last rocks of the land’s end
where sand begins, and the continent drops off.
Along the cliffs, the tiny primroses are shaking
in the salted wind. Downcoast, where the sand is white,
or gray, the footprints of the generic gulls
lead to sand-dollars, broken open, and a million shells
in fragments pulled back, then pushed forward,

by the tide. Rolling on their edges, or gliding
on their surfaces in their slow transformation
into sand. At the horizon, miles combine
to make a line led to by the rhythmic emerald
of the tide. A light blinks, somewhere distant,
and buildings on the far shore glitter, but cannot be seen.
The houses of the millionaires, hotels, seawalls
make the shore a slum. The shunts of sea-grass

nod unknowingly, scattered throughout the dunes.
Remember my father carrying us out on his shoulders
where the water was deeper than he was tall, the brown
pods of the seaweed bouncing, and the empty
egg-sacs, like brown rubber medical straps, tangling
with our pickle-sized feet,
darkening our tee-shirts. Bracing for the cold, finally
dunking under into a roar of ocean entering

our ears. The cold, sticky saline rinsing us, devouring us,
in a film of ten-million minerals. I must have been
my nephew’s age, or just a little older, and my brother
one year younger. All seas the same. A few stars pale
among the pink glow of the cities on the far shore.
My sisters with their shins washed
by the water, many yards away. They might be

mermaids rising to the surface with their combs
to catch the clumsiest of the landlocked princes,
or sea-lions, or walruses, they are that far from me.
If I close my eyes to hear them, I might hear
the great silkies singing in the brine. How
could we have known we would be walking
through the worn frames of a literary cliché?
Or that the anthemic silent rising of the moon

littered with banners, golf-balls, eternal footprints
would be destroyed, as we all would, in the clockwork
of the spheres? The shore is cleaner than the six-pack
rings and Styrofoam pebbles of my squandered
youth. Put your sneakers on, both dry and clean. This
is the koan of the beachcomber who drowned
for me, that I might tell you of the Earth before you came.
If only I could be pulled in, made half-fish to scour the deep,

to dart into grottoes in great underwater mountains.
If only. I would give you up for that, and dissolve here
on the edge into a child’s handful of foam. Think
of all the dead things drifting through the fins, the nameless,
pulsating globes of flesh, blind, coursing with electric
light, dragging stinging tendrils and the labial skirts
that enact undulation. The frivolous amputees
of evolution doing the can-can in the rains of waste.

II.
LOVE SONGS FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

FIRST LOVE SONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

When I was the wind, I felt your face. When
there was no moonlight, and I held your body in the dark,
your neck, your arms, the small of your back and the cups of
your buttocks pouring your legs, I wrapped around your body
until it was my own. This is what it feels like to have a body
thought the wind and blew away. And when
I was the moon,
I searched for you. Look at the trees, I said, they are hiding
my family, you, from me. For when I was a boy with my head
pressed against a window forgetting the visit, forgetting the traveling,
the blurring of the earth and the faces of the earth, until only
the moon was my family, not touching me, even with heat,
not speaking, keeping watch over, reminding me that the sun
would be following, someday, and blaze. This is what a son and father
are, and the night was bright with a billion pairs of eyes, each one
complete with its own baby moon.
When I was the Rider,
I walked. I will run with the ponies until they are stallions. And now, here,
love, you, falling in love with you here, stallion, waiting for you,
gathering our armies in, I see the kings seizing the crown to rule
for his men, through his men, with his men. Now owning, but owing. And I
see

religion has nothing to do with God, but with the follower. People, your beliefs
mean nothing to me, meant nothing to Jesus, Judas, Siddhartha, Mohammed, Vishnu and Seth:
we come to you to show you something better: eat this bread, and not my body.
Drink this wine and not my blood. You never listen, and you never learn. You hate
The face of God and all his sons. And that's why the wolves and horses must be kings.
And that's why the wolves and horses must be men. All, all, all

the betrayal you crave is coming. From us. This is our marriage gift to you.

SECOND LOVE SONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

When I have been absconded with, when the men
who should be Our men take me in, your eyes
make me strong. They are the only thing my soul
can see and everything else a misdirected shaft
of light bouncing off some unsalvageable clock, a moonbeam
folded back into translucence in a glass tumbler of water.
When I am underground, stallion, I see
just how full of hell two heroes are, how Lucifer
leaps and shines among the screaming stones. Not
the villain Lord of Hell, instead the watchdog
of the damned, who will with everyone, rise again.
Forget the flesh that failed you, and the baked
and brittle bones. The rivers here reach out, but
the boatmen crave a prize. Tonight, my love, tonight
my men, drop your coins in sewers, bury them
near graves, place them in your mouth and swallow them
to appease the gobbled wolf. Any king knows:
fight frenzied, frenzied, then return to our table
to be with your beloveds. Take no prisoner or trove:
each city has an angel let him free to soar and scavenge.
And we shall sharpen and shine the silver daggers,
and make walls and buttresses of them. And this
the only means for you to visit us is to annihilate forever
on the glittering point-like blades of our walls.

THIRD LOVE SONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

How I watched you from the rain as I went
riding by, the sun streaks in your hair
combed by the car’s mostly open window: where’d
you go, where did you come from? Most of me
is bits and fragments of the wide eyes of the husbands
turning down. And we all learned from the ground:
the worthless coins, abandoned leaves, how dust
retains the colors of the mountains and the beaches
that they were. The storm-drains

clogged with leaves, the storm-drains thirsty
for the hurricane and snow, the tantalizing winter
and the endless draughts of spring. My bright commander,
I am yours. To hold and guide with your embraces,
kiss and vanquish endlessly in dynasties of peace.
Our home will be the resting place for all our kings,
and there we will in make music in the truth of history
without a hero. History will be the board-games of the kingdoms,
history will be the feasts of dumb fowl and fish,
and all manner of beasts whose flesh we need to be strong.

Let the mockingbird retaliate against the night
and sing for her own eggs. Let the bitter sting
of volcanoes boil without the bodies of our brothers.

Let the middens stink and crumble into happy ground
for schools and markets. Let the ruins be condemned
to be fields of prairie grass again. And let you
hold me in the dark and light, and I will hold you,
and the moon in all its faces bend to bless us into sleep.

FOURTH LOVE SONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

An empty space is only as huge as the eagle that commands it,
love. Reach inside me, see how the atoms spread apart
like galaxies, like solar systems, proximity a myth
of gravity and position, reach into me where molecules
unhook, where atoms slow and drop, and every smaller
particle crumbles, like the lie of history, into just a little dust.
Be content with our bodies, then, these marionettes,

this game of shadow play. Let our love be mindful
of the universe and our bodies be that map in Braille.
I love lightning, as you do, but you are steadier, more
true, I count the seconds of your distance with
my whetted tongue. You are above the old humped mountain,
now, above the lake: the waters of the reservoirs
are thrumming with your body like enormous drums,
you are all sound, and I am wind, pressing
back your body, struggling to hold you back until,
as one, we fall down to the toadstool yards and drink
the sweet, soft rain, drop by drop, from each other’s lips.

FIFTH LOVE SONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

Always the full moon meant not one face, but the face
of all of us returned. Like the man alone
in the carnival hall of mirrors, manifold, inverted
and reversed, only to be made whole in the darkness
of the vestibule, and then the blinding whiteness of the day
where every color of the spectrum blends to make one
light. And always the moon had his eyes on you, on me,
ancient mirror of dust under which all of our older brothers lie.
Leap, long-legged leopard lord, rejoice! Down here,
we all remember you as who you were: the student
with his books and balls, the soldier and the bridegroom
with his suit of lights, the old Elvis in all of us. And if
you had lived, perhaps we would have been free all of this time,
and I a normal lion of a man. It's all the same to me,
traversing the murky bottom of the Styx, diving for the pearls
in the mad-eyed oysters of the river boat, all the same
for me who rises above the clouds, the holey ozone, past the sun
and the maelstrom of suns and the maelstroms of galaxies
to the instant when, collapsing, the universe held still, seething,
then gave birth to itself again. Let dripping Lilith fly,
let Eve, Ishtar, Isis, Diana, Frigga fly.

Let them burn or run. Now together, it will be the all
within the fall of us that will be the deep kiss and the light.

SIXTH LOVESONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

If I could give you the sea, let me begin by giving you
your blood, the coursing, pulsing sea from which we came
throbs in you, my beauty. Can’t you remember the epochs
of bacteria and algae, the translucent pillows, the squirting
thrashing beginnings of the Cambrian? All of this for you, stallion,
all for you. And above, the poison atmosphere where lightning
and thunder ruled the cathedrals from wave to edge of space,
even before the moon itself was torn away. When there
were two earths, colliding, rained on by comets and meteors,
not egg and sperm but fire and stone smashing and collapsing,
collapsing and becoming glass, a passionate beginning,
this is where God named us God. When Lucifer was Lugh,
when Chronus and Eros, Aten and Ptah sat on their
islands in the black sky drowned in red miasma and they spoke
our names: Wolf and Stallion. They will return this earth
to order. They will make it plain that the warrior is lover
to the warrior and leave the families to be raised
by the father and the mother, when they learn and grow
to truth. This is just the truth I know, and elsewhere
where two heads rest against each other under seven

tiny moons, where electricity gurgles in the throats
of the seahorse—like soldiers in a grotto in a blue-green sea
we dream of one another, we sleep and dream of holding
one another when everything was very close and we were free.

SEVENTH LOVESONG FOR THE KING OF THE HORSES

The frogs in the scummy swan pond stop croaking. Their throats
bulging, the veiny skin thinning below the full yellow moon
they are remembering their tadpole days, remembering
their brothers and sisters who would be eaten. Such
a cacophony of groans, creaks, and squeaks they make
in counterpoint to the crickets, bowing their legs, and the pheromone

green pulse of the firefly: end of this summer, this one
without cicada, the night its own messenger, and I am
no satellite of anything, but the shadow that falls
from its absence move into me, take cover. The aquatic waltzing fruit fly
in the paper bag of half-ripe tomatoes, splitting and scarring
at the stem's cicatrix. The black-eyed Susan and the milkweed
sagging on the desiccated stems, the brown plush capsules

breaking open into a million downy paratroopers, and you,
where are you hiding? Fighting? Sleeping? These are my last days
without you. How they hurt, and ache, and please,
having been so fully exercised. Rumble of thunder, we are storms,

and in our thrashing fantasies of peace we will cancel
one another out, not two but Zed. The nothing of a dog day
of an island in the deepest seas. And the universe
of fingers brushing fingers over the stiff lips of two bottles.

III.
THE SNOWFLAKE BABIES

STATUE OF A FALLEN GENERAL

Stone hem, stone lips,
sheer gray balls of eyes
without iris in the sockets,
stone warrior

in robes of stone, cut
as the body is cut
from one slab. Slip
from your foundation,

molten soldier,
do not be stone

as you turn
toward the wind,

raise your saber
from its scabbard
to pierce, pierce and bleed
the morning moon,

the pale mother
in the darkness peering down
at us, her babies,
She coos.

THE SWIMMER

I came from the water, wanting to change things.
The sand, why couldn't it behave less
and blow everywhere, wear down the eyes
of the waitress crying at the Ding Dong Cart
with her nickels sticky and the creamsicle bled?
I wanted the salts on my lips to hurt.

And there were crickets sometimes, and the smell
of the August leaves, over one hill, were sexual,
pungent but sweet, as if something torrid
and extremely enjoyable had ended
and the shops should cover themselves
and rush away, promising to call.

And you know that they never will, and you
are thankful, and smoke two cigarettes
and then three others. You'd have a snack

but who knows where that mouth has been.
Ah, how we fool ourselves always. See,
I turn at the edge of the tide

and wave at the swimmer laughing over his head.
I am thinking, “How interesting it would be
if he drowned, and an ambulance came,
and the lifeguard, unusually handsome and with
that slick whistle of his or that knobby dog-tag chain,
got chastised by the police!” But don’t quote me.

I’ll deny it. I’ll touch your bottom and pretend
I didn’t. I’ll tinkle in the white dunes
and really enjoy it. You can’t bone me
with the tidy detail, the unctuous rhetoric
of the common aesthetic. Look—there
on the road the ice-cream cone-
pointing up where the nose of the snowman
offed by the mob.

WAR SONG

We come and go from the garden. Eating
snow peas, one by one, from the pod
cradled in our fingers, slim green crescent moons.

Are you stabbed by the leaves
of the stiff weeds browning, the obscene
dimpled face of the sunflower

among the desiccated brown
rows of the papery milkweed. I could stand
in these woods, and my fingers

snap back, one by one, oozing
white sap and falling
among the hollow twigs. What

are we doing here in the familiar tableau?
Even a queen, whose every sight
has been planned in advance

by committee, has gone to the window
and cried at the death of the hyacinth,
the stumbling butterflies drunk

on the mead of the autumn apple.
And how can the president
not stand by the sundial

and not notice the black fungus
spattering the near-empty bird bath
and not cry for the cardinal,

the bloody dagger that
startles the winter thinker
into spring? How can

he not think
of the boys sinking to their knees,
looking frantically in the dust for their fingers?

I suppose it is the same reason
I cannot tell you of Delia
with the mallet and hands

itchy with flour that will not wash.
The blue glass goldfish (on the window sill)
filled with buckshot.

II.

How much rain can make a ruin
from a mountain? What weed,
what seed, what

beak broken on the eastern
wall amid a kit of feathers?
I have nothing, nothing to show you,

nothing known. It is nothing
for me to sit here, watch the horizon
conflagrate and fear the wind

with its oil and ash
take the breath from the naked

man on the hangman’s platform.

Perhaps it is the naked man,
all along, that I have been trying
to convey to you:

the voice in the barren
field, shattered on the cobblestones,
in tones meant for nobody but me.

III.

Helicopters zip, hover then descend
among the threatening branches of the banana
trees. Thick yellow shovels of the fruit
dangle, swing, and drop. Below, among

the commas of the refuse, enormous
spiders drop, plop, quickly flip themselves up
scuttling afterward. Nature’s Adams’ It.
The temporary hurricane, dust

rising from the gravel beds in sheets
pebbles and flecks of grit lifted and spit
in the wide circumference of the copter’s
circles whirlybird. But there is nothing

of the bird to you besides the ascension
to great heights. A plane—a jet, perhaps,
but not this cumbersome, squat fish
with two enormous, clear, colorless eyes,

eyes one is not meant to see, but see
from. Now, look, there in the east, there is
a swarm of them, all flying—pushing forward
through the air, fly...

The low plantations surrounded by the found
stone walls, propped up on foundations
of the similar stone, pieced together
almost perfectly, and cemented together

as a shattered crock might be. Grasshoppers—
(locusts? is a thing of locust if it’s not
a plague?)—perched on the wide leaves,
still but for their tiny eyes, darting, darting,

deflecting sunlight and reflecting the trees
still, dripping with the mist and pour
of the early morning rainfall, dried
but not eradicated by the noon-

hour peelings of the moon. The silver light
on soldiers' shoulders, on the fatigue mosaic
of the bivouac as it bumps
and spins, roars forward

toward an unseen goal, and falling
behind them: broken stalks, the sandy
casket of a blue-faced monkey
lying surprised, in state, and

the furry hands of tarantulas that cannot know
anything outside the twitching things inside its web,
its hole, its burrow, who knows what?
I am a stranger to these, and have not inquired further.

SNOWFLAKE BABIES

I.

The snow-ploughs scatter sand
in gritty fans along the gutters where leaves,
left from the town's suction
collection are frozen flat
and melting a bit in the noon
sunlight: bright, clear, cold.
Rhododendrons, pails of soaped
ammonia steam
stewing rags on walkways,

blacktop beside tires and dingy cars
to be washed new again, freed
of smog, salt, sand, the sticky
residue of nicotine on inside
surfaces, droplets nearly gum.
The bare tree and the evergreen
seem equal in this climbing light,
but when it fails it will seem
the smudged sketch of the leaveless trees
will be all twilight
stirred into a stingy smoke.
I am the broker of the afternoon
full moon. I hunch in wool
and denim, and my worn, flat shoes.
There are moonstones of white quartz,
scratched dull, no lenses
to capture the sun to scatter it,
shatter it, twist
or transform it into spectrums.
I represent this unbroken,
common light. I let it
float back on the river
as the current chokes
the stones, spreading
the ropes of it, the cones, the hot
white blocks that blind
the land-slug and the frogs
that push themselves into the water
underneath the moss among
the crates and rods
of the abandoned reactor. I come
among you, having been
bathed, the synapse and the cell
tripped in multiplicities, stunted, snagged
by radiation. One
such as I is burned, but more
I am transformed. Permanently
submerged in not the dust, the matter,
squirt and gas of stars, but
the engines of its transformations. Catch
my eyesight like a moth
falling backward from a flame.

II.

The business of the missionary
condemns him into pandering. One
will point at any action and show it
to be the work of Satan, or of other
fallen angels. Explain how the brightest

tends to fall, how Lucifer, dusting himself off
had a cat squat and squirt a pint
of piss in his handsome face, explain
how pride becomes hubris beneath
such a decimating humiliation. Make

a remedy for agony, rape, pleasure
into guilt. Show how sugarcane
will end, through gluttony, as the jiggling gut
that the hunted will flop onto and be eaten,
devoured, really, by the lithe, instinctual
tiger. Rip the guts out of the painted woman
and the tempted man. Make

Mrs. Puss, not a change purse,
but a treasury, a museum, arboretum,
aquarium…a sacred place, a water-tower, a silo…
make all women the guardian of the collective grain,
responsible for the moral starvation of the clan. The tribe.
All people. Hurt the youngest into modesty

and link the harps and tambourines
to Lord Jesus. Adapt their landscape to the tales
of salvation and the sweet blood of the overcome zebu.
Show how the savannah grass sweeps forward,
like a sea, a tide of unseen waves, how the grain
parts and surges at its ghostlike procession. Do not.

Do not confuse them.
Wait to make them sorry. There will be time to give them pain,
and for you, having made ready, to escape
and take your conquests from the spittle traps
of God’s mouth. Give them food and nakedness. Having
believed in the Almighty, may they be ready for its human face.
Even you will not remember when you were not God.

You might look down at some water-walking insect
and become puzzled at its gait, as if
you’d never seen it, no less made it, from the dust.
Look at the hyrax, or the bunched
banana with its ovaries
hiding the blue-faced, many eyed
tarantula. The Venus fly-trap. The aardvark nosing,
hosing in the stinky bush.
You are mortal and do not know if you should laugh and cackle
or weep, puzzled by your own creations.
These dreams, once set in motion, that prove neither noble nor amusing,
nor even interesting. Perhaps,
bored as you are, the great fields of stars

and prairies make some sense. Is this,
or this, more interesting than a hand of cards?
Is the black hole making ready to swallow everything
but burping out great searchlights of radiance
all-in-all a bit of needlework, a handful of polished
painted bones, a quick arbitrary fuck?

III.

By now, you must be hankering
for the lowdown, the twaddle from the skinny.
You must be First Class to Bismarck
stuck instead on the bus out of Berryville.
We are points on a graph, we're getting there,
we are co-ordinates, notches on the bed-post,
absent but abnormally fixed in the former fuckdom.
Oh, appeasable weaned, lollygagging,
wagging lips at the invisible nipple,
resting in its eighteen hours, dripping
its wasted mammalicious effulgent—

do you see the white dunes, the snow drifts
among the pyramids, this ocean bottom
broken and broken again by the waves
and the waves of the tectonic plates,
advancing, rolling and crashing in years
and not instants. Are we here

or are we flickers of shadow on the bare
rock wall? The tick of the watch, the second-hand,
the slow, grinding click of the last day
of the calendar back to the one?

IV.

Do you imagine yourself a murderer? You
aren't a murderer. Not a killer. You
annihilate, destroy before
becomes. You lie
distracted as
the act lies frozen, pinned down
by the hooked roots of the deciduous:
look. Look and smile
as the birds flicker
in the neon blue,
pulses of adrenaline, pulses
of thought. Twittering
in chevron formation, as one idea
reaches out and communicates with twelve others, although they
point

and soar in one direction. Feathers,
one dropping, weighted
with a passing veil of fog, another
swooping, dipping, slicing
toward earth: all this is thinking.
But there are instincts, involuntary actions, reflexes.
There are submerged motivations. When
your hands are dripping with blood
can you smell that gore? Is
there a riddle in the steam
rising out of the opened body? The difference
is the possibility and the realized.
Possibility. Potential. Proof. Evidence.
Theory. Hypothesis. Fact.
Innuendo. Rumors. Legend. Religion. Myth.

FUNGI

I.

What can be pictured by the bee
following the scent trail of the scout,

understood? I am lonely
and afraid of bugs, bored
by myself and jealous of the yellow

plush striped with red. Smoke
among the honeycombs,

the hive in flight, the queen
secreting everyone. The wise face
of the monkey dipping long fingers
into the hollow tree combs,
the faces in the branches
and the swinging bodies in the dark,
the trapeze swinging through the loping
warm wings of the moon

tethered fruit bats. Buddy,
I watched a television show
about the sycamore fig and the symbiotic
relationship it has with the fig wasp,
so tiny “that it can fly
through the eye of a needle.” Everything
I know of nature comes from television,
relatively simplistic books. I never

held a snake, stalked an antelope.
Someone said, “ The tiger gave the antelope
it’s speed.” Oh, it’s true, but I
can see nothing, and nothing new comes from me.
How can I be weary of the limbs
that never had you? Unfinished face, unfinished
boy, barely alive before your body
gave you back, could not

contain you, spat you
in the dirt and ran off laughing,
grew wings? No, no, dissolved,
dissolved and dripped to root level. Tonight
my mind is filled with the poetry of fungi,
the announcement that a fossil, three hundred thirty feet high
was a fungus. Can’t you see it, in the blue dark
of a night above a scraggly plain? Trees

like ferns, asparagus, the tallest three feet tall, or was
it six, whatever, can’t you see it? Before anything took flight, before
the flower, the amphibian, that restless fish? Perhaps
before the moon? Or was the moon a craggy ring, not yet
collapsed into the mirror it would be? I love
this earth without a blade of grass, without politics, without—
crawling with millipedes, and centipedes, and worms
the size of crocodiles, before the crocodile. Buddy, can’t you see

the towering, bulbous things, and get this, neither plant
nor animal, closer to us than ferns or cycads, fungus

freaking marvelous, secreting enzymes onto foodstuffs and absorbing them
—
holy crap, my brother, what a world was that
where mushrooms ruled the roost and differed from us most
in that they could not eat. What if they could? They'd have to walk,
or swim, or float. But there they sit, sucking bullshit
through their skins. Like it or not, we're all a part of that. Amen.

II.

Moonlight trembling on the hooded eyelid
of the cyanotic spotted frog. The hump
of his glistening body, the thinning skin
of his throat-sac as it bulges, gulps
its song in the reeds, roots and scum
flickering with marsh-grass.

What can be pictured by the bee
following the scent trail of the scout,
the million facets of the eye, what can be
understood? I am lonely
and afraid of bugs, bored
by myself and jealous of the yellow
plush striped with red. Smoke
among the honeycombs,

the hive in flight, the queen
secreting everyone. The wise face
of the monkey dipping long fingers
into the hollow tree combs,
the faces in the branches
and the swinging bodies in the dark,
the trapeze swinging through the loping
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this earth without a blade of grass, without politics, without—
crawling with millipedes, and centipedes, and worms
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the towering, bulbous things, and get this, neither plant
nor animal, closer to us than ferns or cycads, fungus
freaking marvelous, secreting enzymes onto foodstuffs and absorbing them
—
holy crap, my brother, what a world was that
where mushrooms ruled the roost and differed from us most
in that they could not eat. What if they could? They’d have to walk,
or swim, or float. But there they sit, sucking bullshit
through their skins. Like it or not, we’re all a part of that. Amen.

THE FROG APOCALYPSE

The frogs' god is a goddess.
Here, among the weeds and water-striders

sprawls the lord. Her long legs, muscle
and tendon under slick, spotted skin
of green and yellow vanish in the scum
hauled up in the boys' net. Woe

unto him who fell this prey. They drink
and whistle as they hanged her, pinned
her frail palms to the dogwood, bursting
with white blossoms. The sky a gray
and green with April rain. The frog

a sentry in her eggs owns the river
and the long, striped pike. She knew
the wind was wrong, the croaks and music
from the marshlands was too dim,
and wan. Could not imagine how the jungle

frogs were dropping from the trees, could not
be fearful as the toads crawled
gasping from their winter sleep in frozen
sediment, only to explode. Mosquitoes
and the flies her tongue snapped out

to capture were plentiful and fat.
She could not know that she was one
of a dying breed. Had never seen
the tracks, or trains dragging their cargoes
of a hundred manmade poisons. Never

understood a boat, or knew the names
of any child, at a distance, slapping
their feet against the water from a long
dock, or the wood planks growing dry
above the water level and splintering

in the sun. She would not even
name her children, but now's too late
for that. We know what we know
and eat the rest. Who are these things
that stab at her with spokes and sticks

with glowing, pale red ends? Who
will watch the river, asks the abdicate,
pulsing on the tree bark, staring out
from clear black liquid eyes? She sees
the hand, a flash of silver, then

the pain is gone. Her goiter throat
a bulge, to the boys a popped balloon.
There, the sun breaks through the clouds,

and yellow shadows twist and mingle
on the soft grass and their faces. Then,

the light is hidden by the sky again:
a coincidence of cloud, or a proper
mourning from the created from her nature.
I hope the river swells with tadpoles
and the birds and fish would leave them all

to flourish. Who can I tell
to spare these orphans? Not a man,
nor woman, laughing as they march
amid the great extinction...

Beside the yellow wall, the dying bat
pulses and crawls to shake the light, but light
is everywhere. His brown fur body
and his leather wings could fit

into my palm, or be eaten whole
by a dog. Remember dark? remember
moonlight? How the trees
and lamp-posts heard your voice

and showed you home? Remember
spiders weaving in their sticky nets,
and the sound of their sucking
on the bodies of the moths

and horseflies? What can you
recall, here in the cedar chips
and painful blaze? Are you full
of rabies, waiting to lift

and drop on me with madness
and jaws twitching with poison?
You make no noise. Your voice
lies with you, blindest at noon.

The mouths of all of them are what I’m after:
the songbird with its throat split open by a blade,
the shark and tiger with their jaws aligned with knives,

the west wind curling on their tongues lagging
and their nostrils quivering to taste the blood upwind.
To be dressed in feathers, hunched in fur

with my lips to the earth and my ear to the stalk
of the dry grass, tensed as drums and galloping
with horses ten-thousand paces off. The terrifying

faces of the Black-Eyed Susans with their faceted eye
and mane without a mouth, the petals
closing about my face as I lean in to look,

bees gathering at my neck to chide me
off and toward the powdery flowers of the golden rod.
To touch each bee, pet the black and yellow plush

beneath the paper wings. Where am I now?
Deep underground, where the hibernating frogs and cicadas
sleep in frozen muck, where seeds wait

to be split by sunlight on the mud around them
or moving in and out of leaves, the paper peeling
from the birch or in the oak-tops, where

in the summer invisible spiders cast their webs
into the wind and shimmy butt-first tree to tree,
until they reach the river and its dark rippling face—

here, I hear the sirens disappear among the traffic
and the wind-chimes of the veteran downstairs
drowning Charlie in beer and aiming guns

at venison—the swift, sleek bodies of the deer
don’t look how they taste. Deer should break open
like fruit with sweet flesh and a hundred

bloody seeds, should burn with a cold blue flame
that seers the mouth shut opening to catch
the flesh—here. What am I? Nothing,

a man among a peacock’s quivers, a man
pounding on the bullfrog’s throat too warn the cells
of each amoeba in the broken river. Oh,

what am I? What? The snow melts

faster than my mind among the garbage cans
and sorrow of the skulking dog. I am nothing

if not sight, and what is seen
cannot be shaken—there, my two hands
and the words that stare at me,

how can I make this moonlight again?
The old man handing paper flowers to the children?
The mother with the child whose face betrays

its journey toward me—Downs' Syndrome.
I want to shrink, whoop and ride the dragonfly
above this dirty city, drop all these words

and skate the water, taunting fish
and hum above the skaters and their cries—
what am I if my body cannot rise

and my transformations eat my face,
devour my eyes, my lips, and gnaw
the flesh from around each crooked molar?

IOWA CITY

I cannot tell you of primroses, I
cannot show you the blue jewel feathers
of a peacock mingled with the emerald
and the blood-drop dripping of his comb
there in the gravel, behind the fence
of iron mesh. What do I know
of the fine blue porcelain villages
beneath the silver knife? What

do I know of mahogany
cabinets crammed with ancient
correspondence and bills of sale?
On the highway-side
frozen carcass of the doe
turns to bone beneath the spring
and eight years pass. I am
closer to the bones than I was

when I passed them
a thousand miles away, perhaps
I can assure you that her babies
are leaping beneath their great racks of horn,
are kneeling in the darkness
terrified of guns and hunters in the drifting snow.
I can tell you that the coral reef
has seeped to stone

and the glacier pushed
and scraped the land flat
into prairie, and dragged
it back over the ocean floor.
I can tell you someone
fell from a mountain in Colorado,
and someone hanged herself. I can tell you
I had no time for her

just hours before. I can tell you
I gave her all the time she needed
and everything I had. Love,
and the moon with its coy faces—
I can tell you that the moon
was hurled out from the earth
and pulls and pulls
at it to be reunited and drowned in its salt waters.

BOG

In the sign of munch and mumble
the great backwaters of the solvent
slide. Take each hump of land
to be the sleeping giant or the lady
of the swamp and bog. The underworld
awaits us underneath the brackish
water and the spirits there, go see them

with their torches of Greek fire
flickering in the brown weeds
many fathoms down. Don’t touch
the frog that balloons by the water’s
edge, don’t trust the tree branch
that bends over to broom
the surface with its sweep of leaves.

Let the dim parade be seen
by you in safety on the grassy bank.
They will try to taunt you in
to walking in, promise you trout
with supple, silver bodies, promise
you golden bands, make mockery
of your manhood for your fear

of salty water and unearthly light:
stand still. The lord of blue sky
will not be bent by a stranger’s words—
retreat with what you’ve seen
and be a king of men. Know
where you can go to with your broken name
and come back strong again. Ravens will

not waste the hand of such a king.

REHEARSAL

The hum of the bass string buzzes and fades. The fiddle
and the instruments I could not bear have grown
colder, leaned against the curtain and the portable
speakers. Fiery switches have been flicked off, and the hall

is dark. Who will I dance with in the exit lights shadow
and letters of light? Whose lips will I brush with mine to make
music of? There is a mountain with its peaks of snow
cementing the crevasses. There is the July cuckoo

with its wings rifled by the East wind and its stiletto tongue
surfing its summer song. I am alone with the dust tumbling
the spotlight, followed to the source, shut off to a spiral wire
of orange flame. There is no place to throw my voice, no

puppet to flirt with. I don't believe that my body will charge
again, caught in the morning's first beam. Where will my yawn
be terrifying, where will my whispers crack the hillside and carry
down the avalanche? When will the birds of the mountain call out

to me to finally hold my tongue and leave the silent wilderness to them?

SHANTY

Turbulent and thirsty sea drinking itself
below the pulling and the silver light of noon
upon its waves, you were to me

distracted in my life to assume your safety.
Now, you’re gone. I close my eyes
and quiet falls. Outside the window
propped open with a cigarette box

the evening traffic roars,
my god, how many times can I
tell you this, I have been tongued
and gutted, in my mouth

the night air washes in and out,
whales and jawless fish
circle my teeth and swim my veins
looking to live again, there is no

life left in my bones. Sea,
come to me. Hurt my thinking
into life. Let my body be
the night wind high above these tenements

and my throat swallow the damsel bent for Hell.

BLACKBIRDS IN HARTFORD

Heat heals the soil of wounds made by the rain,
and having drunk, the grass shines green
below the spindled branches with their budless
lightning-strikes sparking from the cracked

and twisted trunks. The black feathers
of these birds are blue, three of them,
picking through the spotty turf below the gingkoes
of the hospital lawn. The white plaster fountain

surrounded by the rugged shrubs is an ugly stump
and there is one way to see the blackbirds
beneath it: are these descendents of the fractured
watcher haunting Wallace Stevens, would

he have laughed to know that once there was
an age of birds the size of paddy wagons, that these
voracious darts were brought to us by dinosaurs, raptors
gradually transformed by falls and jumps

into the faceted masters of his fear?
Go down, sun, we know we are what turns,
wheels from predators, melts into the dew
heavy on the clover. Let these birds be blind

and I will turn from them and bring
wings to myself, in burlap bound cargoes, for my sleep.

ON READING THE NAMES OF THE PUBLISHED IN A HUNDRED MAGAZINES

Among the hundred names I knew, I read
your name, and cried. Reaching, as I am, back
to reconnect with colleagues, that I could not be
that to you was the one great failure

of this new century, what I could have built
or lost, but never had. Blue smoke curls
and eddies from my mouth, caught in the striped
light of the window’s shade, sand or seed

disseminated in clear, primordial seas: I drag
my hand through it, and find nothing. No ghost,
no dream of ammonites, or trilobites, no fish
with thorny carapaces darting in the sun’s

blue caverns into sightless dark. I cannot hide
from you, I never could. My wrists ache,
and I want you here. Please change your mind
for me and track me down, it would be

like time had, just for once, fallen together
at a perfect kiss. These years had beaten me
and made me strong enough to touch you
in the light. I would give everything for you,

the falling light here, on my hands, my hands,
all ten fingers, just for you. I’d be a coat,
if I could wrap you in my sleeves and bear
the wind for you. Please, come alone. And soon.

LOVE POEM

I dreamed that I touched you
and we were old men, parting

but in journeys or one of us from life
I could not tell. We were dressed

in heavy coats, do you remember
trying to drag me out into the snow

and sunlight, do you remember
me falling into myself, could you see that

or did you leave me there
uncertain why you tried? I don’t

know you, but I could, again.
Calm and humor have returned to me,

I am a mountain of good will
and every way I groped up

toward the light, each way
I twisted, well, it was

the wrong way up. But
here I am, and I could not

ask you to wait
but if by chance

I’m ready now.
Enough with the moon

and the carnivals, enough
with the pale girl at the back door

wishing on the green bells
of the fireflies. If you are free,

come home to me.

IV.
LITTLE MISS NOBODY

RECOVERY

I am an old man in the sorrow of a child:
my souvenirs are tattered with my fitful play.
I cannot hear the rain fall on my childhood roof,
and I am less likely to save as give away.
My name, my name for nothing.

I never had a camera, and the record's incomplete.
To look at faces kept would be a lie of heart.
I cannot see your face, I looked too much away,
and protecting you, I left shadows in my art,
my name, my name for nothing.

The songs, the poems, the fragmented stories,
suitcases and boxes bursting with unfinished years.
I cannot taste you in the water or the summer wind,
your name still startles my chest, as much from love as fear,
my name, my name for nothing.

And now I start again, gathering to make away,
undone a hundred times, timid now, dripping from the wild
I cannot see my own hands for the gathered branches
and the garlands and the thorns of the playing child,
my name, my name for nothing.

Shadows in the long grass by the highway, shadows
in the doorways of the schools, shadows in the lamps
that cannot shine now in the green light of the twilight
or tell these empty envelopes I could find you with a stamp,
My name, my name for nothing.

HAWK

Plummet, and touch, the wings of the ousted bird
on the wind, bevel, swoop and flutter to the stone wall
from which wizened pines crawl forth and drag their branches
toward the summit that they will never reach.
New feathers
on the spare, cool sunlight and the rigor in the muscles
that twitch and pulse upward from gravity. The forgotten nest
of twig, gum wrappers, and threads of the conquering flag,
shadow of the new flyer over the humps of ice,
and the shadows of the bodies from deep within them,
the bodies in parkas and the gaunt smiles pulled away
from the jaws full of teeth. The popped eyeballs
in the taut sockets, the Red Cross kits, the dead
of mountain climbing crying out to the baby bird:
be quick,
be sure that the sun has no heat for you, up, up, the clouds
are fog among your feathers and the way is down over
the snow, down through the scrub and brush,
down to the valley where the old man holds his face
against the window, wraps the curtain about himself, and calls
out to the sleet just beginning on his walkway for the blue light
to leave him be, to leave him to his coffee, to his walking
and sleeping among the rags of daylight and the cold white moon
among his papers, polishing the doorknobs and the glass
etched with the fossil feathers of the birds that raised the mountain.

On his chimney, the shuffling of the feathers into folded wings
and the wide eyes reflecting the way and the flown spaces.

DOG SONG

Creeping from the dark, coyotes wailing
in the hills scare the children into parents' beds.
See the green moons of their eyes in headlights' glare,
swerve from their bodies as you drive below the budding trees,
the trees now bursting open with spring's yellow green.

Smell their wet fur in the wind, and fear
what they can smell of you, knowing where you move
and what you feel because your life
burns with a fragrance to make a meal of you. Remember,
in your bones, how we had sat, our legs splayed open

to the campfire crackling in the rings of stones,
and the dire wolves and dingoes that routed
through the rubbish heaps for scraps, and stared
at us, a dozen Venuses, bodiless eyesight, trying
to forget the freedom of the wild
                to taste
the red flames' warmth, to trust the long,
spider-like paws of these pink primates fat with meat.
I stood once, three feet from your bed, but ran.

CREATION SONG

Come in to the realm of these last waters: on the mound
of the first created one created from himself,
rising on the wind, and the wind rising in him,

the open mouth on the dogs at the morning gate,
the gold of their tongues melting and hissing
as they drop into the water, and the sandstorms

roaring from their wagging tails. The dogged
beetle with his face to the wheel of the sun,
the cats with their tails curled and stroking

the ankles of the first one, of the crocodiles
scanning the shore, their hooded eyes
reflecting the water-birds with their spindled legs

and necks like crooks. The hippopotamus
grazing the weed-beds of the river's shores,
the flutes on the barges sailing the tears

of the sun, earth bowled underneath
and the sky arcing its back, pressing its belly
full of stars against the straining night.

Turtle of the earth stand still and let
the menageries of life burst forth and fall back
to you. Hide your face from this bright light.

THE SALVAGES

I.

I reach out to touch the wall I feel before me,
tracing the matrix of the brick, the stubble
of the face of blindness, and the mortar. Wind
moves in about me, shaking leaves someplace,
dripping with moonlight. Here, there is no moon,

no voice to move me into clearing, but I feel
the clearing calling me. I smell the rain,
I smell exhaust from speeding cars,
can’t hear them, but feel their tires
rolling over blacktop pressing and cracking

the gravel and soil beneath them. Maybe
I will lean against an iron table
into the laughter of friends in a biergarten,
draw their faces in the sweat
left on the glass surface of the table

left by my water glass. See the marble lion
and the lurching horse with his rider
dressed in green, his skin green, and his sword
upraised to pierce the clouded sky. Perhaps
I’ll find myself in jungle,

wincing to think that fist-sized spiders
might be dropping down on me from webs
in trees wrapped with the scent-nets of the ant army
and a million chirping things, feather-winged
and winged with transparent, veined petals

shimmering around the labial flowers. It’s slow
going here. Who are you? The summer storm
hangs low over me, and thunder rumbles, but
it will not break. Call to me, pull me
with my name out of this maze, this corridor.

II.

I’ve been where you will never go,
traveling the highway of my inner eye, and my body
vibrating inward like a struck bell. Moon
over moon, crimson with the dust of continents
splitting open with molten mountains
trying to be born. See the quick eyes
of the salamander so afraid of fire
it will not die tonight, as the moths
fly into the roiling stone. So

can we stand here and acknowledge
I am back, and I have brought you gifts
of narrative? I need your questions,
absolute certitude mingled with
my mouth open to the filthy rain:
how my tongue hisses with each taken
drop, how my head spins on its axis
and my hair burns in the rays
of the adolescent sun. Seas cover me
and the waitresses are running

from the waves lapping at the naked
shore. All things come from me, and stir
into being at my deepest self: lightning
quickens in the atoms of the salt spray
and courses to the clouds. Touch
the furnace, the television, the doorknob:
static attacks your fingers. Hear my breathing
in the moonlight, hear my slithering, my gasping…
I can’t tell you anything. I am the earth
in the bacterial dynasties, oh won’t you come to me?

LITTLE MISS NOBODY

My ice cream cone dissolved and dripped
down both my hands and I let go.
Sawdust stirred the dark, ignited into bits
of flame, then dropped down, a pinch of dust,

a pinch of ash, like fallen stars. The elephants
reared, trumpeting, and the lions
roared: the deep, lunar green of their eyes
caught on the white flames ripping up

the painted canvas tent flaps, then reflected
flame. Who I belonged to in that instant
wasn't clear: I watched the bright commotion,
seas of faces everywhere turned toward the walls,

turned from the three rings painted on the mats
and the clowns whose faces melted and whose
rainbow hair became a million filaments
of light and circling smoke. I stood

waiting to be trampled down among the screams,
the popcorn sticking to my fingers as it scattered
from the seats above. How hot it was: I sat,
and watched the night sky through a growing hole

above me: a piece of moon, a ring around it
bringing rain too late, and three pale stars. The stink
of cloth and fur and wood and flesh becoming changed
by flame. I was the first to leave my body

to this scrap without a name. The wreckage
and the wilderness of burnt poles leaning crosshatched
in the searchlight aimed into the crackling heap,
the old men in long coats walking gingerly above me.

RAIN ON MAIN STREET

The rain is playing with its fallen self:
its pinpoint entry moving out in concentric circles,
circles spreading out mingling with circles,
circles swallowing themselves. Along the sidewalks
streetlights hue the wet concrete, the concrete
red below the stoplight as I walk toward the street,
flashes black, then red, then green. I must be old:
the air should smell of grass, of gasoline,
ozone from the lightning strikes that shook,
flickered and rumbled overhead most of the night.
My mind is calm, where is the turmoil
that makes such brocades of nights like these?
What can I capture of the peace in me?

The agony of love has passed me by, passed
like the cars that pass me as I walk uphill,
disappearing like the face of tenderness—
I should be craggy, holding up my head
to swallow the west wind pushing the swallow
to the sea, the seagulls in land circling
the garbage heaps, the soaked brown sparrow
that sat blinking just outside my door,
I moved toward it and it stayed, until
just close enough to it when it spread its wings
and darted down then up again into the oak
across the parking lot. I miss the sea,
I miss the moonlight hung above it in green haze,

the young men huddled on the pier just standing
with each other to breathe and fight
long days at labor lying of love to just
to survive. It’s gotten worse, not better,
I want to help but they pass me,
friend and confidant, they pass me and I never

see their faces. Moon, you are my constant,
ball of dust and stone, great mirror
and translator of the sun's harsh fires
and the blood of men and women. In your light
the sea explodes and crashes in our veins,
our blood surviving from the seas we rose from—
how we carry the ancient earth within us

and the trees splattered with the rain
and silver light hide the countless
watchful eyes of those who in the morning
will rise up into the wind and claim the day.

MARIONETTE

I have not survived my youth in lacquer
and hang, dejected, here among my tangled strings.
Once, I made the children squeal with glee
and made their mothers smile. Now, only the spider

with her bearded leer and five faceted eyes
comes near, and is not afraid of me. She admires
my filaments but scoffs the haphazard pattern
of my net-making. She loves the strands of dust

that fall around my checkered coat of green
and scarlet, and my star-shaped collar hung
with small brass bells shaped like split pumpkins.
She looks me in my blue glass eyes

and with six legs begins to weave and pull
her body up to leave me all alone. I could not
feast on houseflies, drink their bodies dry,
and there our camaraderie will end. My boots

are gold and curl over my supposed toes,
but my hands are real enough, and soft
with a showman's leisure. Still, my shining skin
flakes off, and there I am, spotted with age,

a carpenter's evening spent in wood now gray
and splitting all along the grain. I miss that man
whose hands I felt shaping mine, who sanded my face
and scored my ears, who gave me dignity and hair

and placed these rhinestones in my cheeks to see: I saw
him then, and ached to please his strings but I
was created to be seen, and just to fill the hours

of my carving. No one gave me voice,

but once, one great dramatic show, the shadows
of the crucibles that I bobbed and danced from
falling on the stage's rim below me like the ghosts
of once-brave birds who would not land to feast

among the children's upturned faces and their mothers
folding their hands over their bags full of cloth
and juice, a dozen toys. That was my glory, sons,
hanging from the rafters, legion, like me, paralyzed

and caught here like an army parachuting down
into a tangled bower. The limbo of carved clowns,
unable to move to comfort one another with our graceful hands
or painted mouths, I can only guess your thoughts

are like mine. I miss my lord of strings. I miss
the spider with her furry grin. I miss the carpenter
and look down among his creations, unable to cry:
the spool-sized antelope, the tacky pinewood horse

and the balsam butterfly whose spotted wings
are hinged to its blue and violet segmented thorax.
Its antennae of copper wire are dipped in translucent
resin, and painted with clear ruby dyes. The dinosaurs

not nearly anything that lived and now is cased in stone,
the warted gnomes and gargoyles of a young boy's dreams:
we are the refuse of the dilettante, of the broken man
who tells us in the dark that his wish is to himself be strung

and freed of his own will. He'll sit sometimes,
staring at his whittling knife and block of wood, or
through the window to the yard, black and green
with summer moonlight, at the written music of the lightning bugs.

THE HUNTER’S SON

Come to the axe blade where
your father creeps
behind the limping buck
bundled under its rack
of lightning laced in bone:
watch the blood streak
on the polished edge,
staining the whittled
handle of antler, the cruelty
of a man killed
with an arrowhead
chipped from his own

molar. The moon
a pale red in wings
of cloud, black, blue, green, diluted inks,
glowing from behind
where the great
plate burns. Hear the crackle
of the tall grass
shifting in the wind, hear
the wind make a sea
in the shell of your ear.
Remember Isaac and adore
the scar on the buck’s neck

opening, never to heal.
Feel joy for the doe
and her heedless orphans
flashing and leaping
in the light
that closes after them—

the eyes of a child fighting
off sleep,
sleeping to keep
his sleeping eyes open.
Be glad to never
be decapitated, mounted,

made to watch with blown
glass eyes
the secrets of houses: contained
fire, brandy and ten-dollar cigars.
Ripple in your skin, trout
in stream, tensing, pulsing,
its body of silver and oil,
a puddle let loose.

BLOODWORK

It rains in streaks along the broken way:
the high clouds obscure the late afternoon sun.
Of course, it is the path to heaven
and the dance floor of the seraphim

looking for a pin, and camel to be walked
through the needle's eye. Can you hear
the rich men grunting with their beards
dragging in the sauce among the biscuit

crumbs? Can you hear their wives
sneezing in a cloud, toward and into
of whale oil perfume? Can
you hear the servants snickering over

scraps of lamb left in the platinum tureen?
Oh, god of dogs, lord of salamanders, lift
your head out of the trough and squeal
a warning to the dusk: I come to heal.

The apparition of the rising moon is silent
in the bird's egg blue. How sad he looks
above the city on the burnished hill. How
cold he seems, trapped there in his orbit

without arms or legs. How he must long to touch
the sun that feeds his eyesight with ten thousand
gifts. How he must long to drown himself in clouds
and swim the round blue water that worships him,

that neither dust, nor void, nor light, cannot
be known to him, except perhaps in memory. Stone

mirror, I wish that your climbing orb could speak to me
instead of dragging and pulling at my veins in indifferent rising.

Tell me what you've witnessed: the flood, the wall,
the ice creeping down and scouring the continents. The continents
themselves, slowly shifting under the swift circling clouds.
Are continents the ships beneath the constant sails of the clouds?

Did you watch Jesus sweating blood beneath your light
by Gethsemane? Rising in daylight did his execution
on the cross—
his entombment and his rising in his servants' eyes—

ROOT CELLAR

The shadow
shudders
and creeps
underneath
my feet
into the bin
of flour
in the corner
of the cellar,
underneath

the coal chute
sooty under
grimy layers
of soil and dust.
Onions hang
in orange nets
from a hook
screwed in the rafters
of dried wood, split
and buckling. Cobwebs

hang and spiders
grown fat
in their watch
twitch
their spinnerets.
The packed dirt

floor leads
to other rooms, shelves

of rusted nails
and screws, refrigerators
with their doors
leaned up
against them, broken
sheets of glass.
The dirty windows
show a gray light
through their grime,
and half
obscured by grass.

THE CHILD WITHOUT BONES

The blackbirds and grackles twitter in the temple
eaves. In the bell tower, the bats hang, tiny bags
of skin that scatter at the clanging or the moonlight,
the sound of moonlight opening among the leaves
of trees. The baby without bones twists in the bucket

by the priest's bed. He stirs it with a spoon
of polished wood, and pulls her palm above it
to take in the aroma of the created soul. The bells
will scare it into being around the hanging skeleton
pressed between the fur coats and the long robes

of black silk in her closet. The child will laugh
in scents of cedar wood and mothballs, break
its birthing fast with milk squeezed into tin tureens
from the sacrificial cows in the hilled lots behind
the cemetery. In the dark, the altar boys

will swarm among the ossuaries, checking
the open tombs for bones left clean. There is a water-clock
dripping minutes in the open sepulcher. There is a charred
lump on the sacrificial midden filled with blackened
fangs. The spring laughs and hisses through the low

hanging maples readying their colors in light
drinking greens. The boys wait by the lightning rod
on the roof cupping the pale green lamps of fireflies
in their hands beside the silent bell. They lift them
to the moon in the rising arrowheads of a hundred bats.

Below them, the child creeps in its skin draped in rickets. Seeps..p

THE OPTIMIST

The sun strikes the optimist, who shatters
as ceramics do, in pieces with the bright skin
lying with the rough interior exposed. Going into
the matter at hand kills the white dove

and the jerking, strutting pigeon with its red eyes
and its collar of blue and green jewels. The sunlight
strikes these quills, and iridescence blooms
over a throat that gulps down garbage. Are you

hurt by truth as I am, making masks of fragments
of my boyhood certainty, ducking and jabbing
at the hour hand, at the second hand that never moves
but melts, each night, in breezes flowing

from the north window to its southern partner?
I am listening but you can’t reply. Are you
inanimate again? Asleep? Falling in dying in the stiff sheets
of a hospice bed, is what surrounds you

new to you? Are the lights dim to relax you?
I will miss you when you go, nameless
and bodiless, set free once to gambol in the radiation
from which you came, and now surrendered to it.

LOVE LETTER TO THE HARVEST MOON

Whatever your origin, whatever
the matter is
that makes you, cold
globe of fluffy
dust, randomly
pockmarked or gazing
with a face
afraid, surprised or baffled,
insentient mirror of the sun,
I love you. Watching

me, I thought, now I
watch you. Knowing
that my blood
belongs to you, that tides
hold remnants
of the ancient
oceans, as my pulse does,
and what my ancestors
swim in, swims
in me. No matter

that no man lives in you,
hunched under
bunched faggots, that
no starlit cow
spilled milk across
the sunset, congealing

into you, green
orb of moldy cheese. No one

needs you like I do.
Sickle, crescent, half, full,
each face, pale silver
surrounded by a hazy ring,
pale blue, verdigris,
orange or a troubling
dusty red, always

I call to you. When
everything is too much
to remember, the shops,
the restaurants, traffic
and the perverted
scrape and whistle
of the creatures in the dusty
summer brush, you
reveal yourself to me
from arcs of elder branches, barques of cloud.

HAZE

What comes to me is the haze
that pales the trees and brick facades,
beaten upon by the sun
four minutes far from here. With
the penchant to be

buckled under, nothing survives
and the oldest tortoise, dead
months now, waddled
on its stumpy legs over
grass, unaware of the history
it did not witness

but survived, and what
to me is man? Everything,
and what beyond the human
is God? I cannot see.
Snowmen melting
in the morning sun,

shells glittering in rain,
emptied of bodies. Smell
the frying flesh and vegetables,
melting sugar, mown grass, the sweetness
of leaves, all below
a black sky wrapped
in pale red clouds. A little

river hissing in the tall, dry trees.
The wings of
sparrows flying over the sun
are transparent.

POEM

Along the road I stand upon the smokers mill,
and I am in the half-hexagon alcove of the old brick wall,
in the protective shade of the madman's trees,

there must have been another here
where I stand, staring at the nicotine stain of my thumb,
first and middle finger, sucking

on the wet pulp of the joint-like cigarette. Across
the street, two gas pumps stand sentry in a mind's eye
of street, sidewalk and green strips of city grass--

brownstones, the beige stone of the post-modern school,
the stamp size heroin baggies and the squashed butts
on the ground--O love me in return, gray sky

and biker blurring past my smoke, love me
as I love you, preserving you inside these lines
of blue-black ink. But you can't love

nor can I do the same. Thank god
of polyploidy and rye bread mold, thank you
for giving me back this poem that hurts me

like candles, dead volcanoes, towers
of hollow wax with charred trees

growing out of the cold of ancient magma.

SKY

I.

Among the twigs and pine needles
the tiny sparrows hold the sky
on one end and the ground

the other, the traffic rolls by
with their lights on, morning
looks like dust. How many

flippers does the moon have
gliding behind the drifting cloud, and I
am hoping that the whale of moon

dives a little closer to the earth,
enough to feel its dust and breath,
dust and breath, another mirror

than the earth itself. Tonight
the fireflies and stars will charm
themselves to one another in the dark

with flickers, sparkles, brand new light
and old light left to fly
from stars and other objects changed

in ways we'll never see. Isn't it good
to hold your hand up to the sun
to refuse the pain of brightness? It

is good, like a sandwich, an icon
or a poem, do you think that one of these is yours?
All of them escape from us

even a toe bone, a mummified head,
a poem filled with birds of various sizes,
avians, I am glad the tiny dinosaurs

have survived, though changed
like the destructible whales singing together
through these temporary seas.

II.

The one-eyed falcon of night swings low,
at the speed of the sunlight. From the promontory
Luda reclines, shaking the bells at his wrists
and his ankles. Loneliness nestles in the feathers,

of the bird with no talons. Dagger to its heart,
and Luda stands drenched in blood
without substance--cloud on cloud, rain
in sleet, the harlequin does not speak,

but sings a dazzling air about
the falcon with one eye which is the night.
The crowds stands five paces behind,
rattling their snake tails, flinging

the purple and orange sea-stars plucked
from the coral shades of dawn. In his heart
a clown's a clown, a bird's a bird,
the villagers make paste from old horses

beneath a bright summer moon, full
and adorned with a ring around its fat face,
the old man carrying sticks, old woman
blowing a kiss, this is what Luda sees

as he wipes his blade clean of nothing,
rifles through the brainless hail of stars
as if he had lost, not something, but everything
he taps on his voice-box to discover that truth.

V.
PINATA

PINATA
In Memory Bill Hobbs [1969-2010]

Without heartbreak, there would be no music. Without ardor
there would be no poetry. Without life, there would be
no death. Yet we go on singing our silly songs
to one another and smiling at our flexing toes. Without desperation
their would be no thirst and without vengeance their would be
no hunger, but we come or don't come, smoke or don't, we eat,
oh we all eat except for the girl with the bones in her palms
slinking from the bathroom to gather her things, all competitive
sperm and perfume mingled with sweat and cologne. She performs
the "walk of shame,"proud and knowing that she will return,
through the door, front or back, or a window, or wire,
or sit in the trees like a mother raccoon and take sentry.

And the seeds stir in the ground at the heat in the dark,
bursting forth from their shells as if they smelled light,
and the concrete and sediment stirs with their birth,
and we drop from our beds with our sleep in our hair,
curling and drifting like smoke from white coals,

like the earth with its oceans of forests and animals
pressed into oils and carbon and diamonds, we
are pressed by the air but we know this is God
heavy like drumbeats in the hearts of small children
on the shoulders of parents whose own hearts are broken,

broken and mended and cracked like cheap jade
one might find in the hair of a Taiwanese child-whore.
And this, you can see, is spring, all this breaking,
all this clamor and dripping and words without meaning,
as we stumble along, powerless, after a battle lost. Kind
and awake, we progress and we gravitate and forget
almost everything, just for a moment, a minute, a song
partially recalled from a sitcom sometime in the 70's,
perhaps just a line in a melody somebody hummed
as the audience sat and waited for laughter. And the girl
is a woman now, somewhere, and giggling,
taking portraits from her bough with her phone and her hurt,
and even her father wants her to fall off.
Oh, all of her life he's been pushing her off. He knows
the child needs to sing, but to sing to herself. And I know
you might as well sever this hand, tie it by the wrists
and hang it by one of those silly trees there, the ones yea high

off the crowd and come down around it, swinging
your sticks and levers, your translucent plastic one because I know
and I want you to know and some of you know this already
there are rhinestone rings in here, and brooches of candy,
don't bother beating the hell out of my... it's only this one hand,
I swear, I swear, it's just the one, and yes, there are sapphires
and gold, there are highways and seas in there all you have to do
to see it is pound the thin skin into tatters and you all can have everything.
Even those pesky bones can be a treat and trick and surprise for you
if you were that much of a fool. What do you think
has been holding me together...poems? Check out the sun and moon
how they swing this way, just a little bit, and the fish rise to the surface,
trying to make a frog's sound, and the frogs' laughing back
and the alligators too fat on fish and frogs to say anything,
and me, holding my fingers backwards, saying all I want, get me
anything I want and I want it all back. Let's start with my fingers. I
want every sticky, oily skinned fin back, then let me be.

WHITHER, HO?

O my generation, you are like the proud trees of the great redwood forest,
aren’t you?
Thigh-master riding your roan cow to the electric fence, you must feel your
splendor, your thighs
thick in the plush of the cow flank,
pressed to the ribs and the lowing. Gloria, powder fresh in your power suit,
look at me, tell me that
we are united!
Tell me that I will have more if I want it, anytime I want it! You could have
been spilled in a Jane
Fonda wet dream or drug-fostered self-abuse, now what?
When the crunchies are swinging their socks full of soybeans into their
Volkswagens pointed up and
away from the nearly former California tumbling into the
sea rushing under
it,
who will appraise me? What will the valence be where something is wrong
with me? One, admonish
me! Somebody, garnish me! Now, my sanguine sisters,
beat me with your
beads!

GLASS OF WATER WORN AS MEMORY

At the window, what was winter falls.
Could be relief: the nudge of memory against the neck,
the lead-weight of it carried by the string
upward from the brook. Could be forget: the day

arriving in the four-story brick building, bricks
weathered a dull red, writhing with the shadow
of the great oak across the street: the shadow show
of branch and leaf and epic of the depth of sea,

the coral reef, families of quick and anxious fish
shaped like the flick of lightning bugs caught
in the feathers of the hummingbird. My hand there
on the rim of the glass, listless fingers wet

against the rim: the cylinder caught in the motion
of the fingertip, the hum of liquid that the glass is
shifting into another pitch. Had been the silent prism
of it, catching sunlight as the eye perceives

the light on objects blurring toward a face,

but rather than keeping it (the way that moonlight
stays along the broken boat, the way that incandescent
light catches in memory the pressed-in-paper

surface of the ink, both alphabet and what
those mingled words reflect and represent, the way
breath caught in the chords produces voice that colors
everything with hurt for human) sends it

separated to the wall in panes of broken light,
in much the manner falling snow might see, Steve.

POEM

My friend died. I am airing out my trunks.
My spastic hand
in the puppet's mouth worn thin at the hinges

from misuse. The jabber. The kerchief
and the string of card-sized flags, the parapet
and cage with nail-sized swing. The parade

is rained on and the tiger's rump is numb. Goodbye,
weepy Billy and piebald Admiral Spunk. I shimmy
into a refrigerator box and pay the mailman

to jab me open with his pen. I stand, unopened,
unlike Waldo, to my jaw's applause. I dress
and cut my coupons. Watched the usher's blunt behind,

tall drink of water, washed down. I will be
comedian and traitor, autophobic, bent
like weasel in a mousetrap, its mouth snapped on the mouse,

the mouse's mouth crammed with cheese,

and the mouse with its head pressed under the snapping wires.
I raise him to the heavens like a squab that I will rifle down.

I need him to be infinite, and die for me, the Christ of windmills
or the king who lies dismembered in the grove,
his head adorning a polished stick, or a dynasty the wind wore down.

I am a coal-hot hound, and will hump anything. Spring
is sap, blood flooding to my eager soldier. Where do you sign up? I am
the beekeeper of Providence, and my honey's

dripping from my combs. My bags are packed.
My pants a dustbowl, attuned to tumbleweed speedometer, my shirt
open to the dust: satyr, rake, roue. Dirty dog. Chicken-hawk.

I am the attendant of the dustbowl Texaco. I am the beekeeper
of Windsor, and my hives are cold.
Terrain the same from stop light to St. Stephen's,

the road a line descending to its smallest point, and beside it all
the spreading desert of brown corncobs on the desiccated stalks.
meat and soul, my muscles nagged and thrashing

trapped thirsty, waving the breakers of a sea,
not to be crossed. Illusionary. You, there.
Look at these hands, still hanging from my wrists.

THE WINDOW

They are at the window, Stephen, and they take
the colors of the snow, their hands at the sill
arced with ovals: light and the memory of light in stars
and wavering illumination as the cold light
bends through glass. I have never seen them
looking out; what would they find there? The fillings
of the old man at the mailbox buzzing
with Afghani drones? Inside that,

the rattling of fierce bees in ecstasy, in hive
with pollen flying and the bent wires
of the green's feet attended to by sugars?
A dog strangling a wych-elm with a chain
tied to its throat, leaping in futility
into the bark it barks? The leaves
burning to be scattered, then the snow too heavy
to be shoveled when the hours are late,

soon there will be a shift in roles, the understudy's

moving up, and the leaders falling from their easy chairs
like ashes from a curling wick, like wings. O Stephen,
how I miss them, the turbulent and fierce,
the angry actors stomping roots for birds.
And I, the silent one, who dressed in rags and clapped
his powdered hands together, mocking them through smoke:
the bridge over that river preening with words

spoken late and quietly against the buttresses,
the cloak of tatters tapping, wrapping me in hurricane
and at the center: calm. Blue sky
dripping from the edges of the atmosphere
onto broken poles and knots of wire:
I could see it, spinning in a dizzy spiral of my pupils—
where'd it go? Where were we when this was happening,
the dogs barking at retreating winds, unaware
of what was spun behind them?

MARKET

On the pond, the ice-dykes crowd and cut
the sky into a ragged circle, white on blue
against the silver, crosshatched black of ice
swelled by slowing molecules at crystal. Scum

to get him home. The dogs are having church.
Their howling praises meat and warns of handbags
with their polished hides and tricking biscuits.
Here they come, their headlight jumping up on him,

slobbering and sick, with incandescent light,
he spills and hoary frogs curl frozen in the weeds
and cat-tail, reed and rusted tent-pole
stabbed into the former rippling water. He comes

stumbling through the palisades of hard snow
frozen in the steppes: his feet first fall
an inch into the crackling mass then plummet in:
he is dark most under eyelids, and his lips

are thin, two scars puffing smoke that push
out, then come undone again. Hoods of hay-bales'
bread-brown fading out of blue, the winter afternoon
fooling light to slow, for Christ-sakes, slow,

to twist and pivot from the facets of the caught
and watching humps: so. There he is. The mean one
with his feet humming with kobolds, hungry ones, that pull
his toes up, herky-jerky, piggy puppets on fine threads.

PROMENADE

Wallflowers wink at nothing, glitter from the parrot
parade float in their eyelashes: the juniors lost—
the light and promise of tomorrow turned hackneyed,
underpaid. O to be a geek behind my glasses,
crushed with lust. A hundred coats tossed

across the steam-tables, while at home
their mothers part the early summer curtains
to the empty space, where before their children stood,
half children, half employee in their formality.
The awkward reach for pin for flower,

the ritual corsage. Twilight deepens in the blue
and green of beer cans in the backyard,
the remnants of the freedom of the rented limousine.
At 3 AM or 4 the lovers not returning
will be admonished by the siren and the spastic light,

and the dazed survivors part the fog and spotlight
with their gait like aliens with heads of medicine balls
stumbling from the mother ship perching on the mountain.
To be a pimpled freak at home with Vaseline
or ice cream, defiant in the television's

contagious trance. To be the worker at his register
or shelf, among the brand new cans
wrapped tight in plastic sheeting, felled by wielded
Exacto knives, the flat hands of the weary
flicking sweat from foreheads. Their hands

shaped like strips of newsprint drawn and dripped free
of the flour and water paste made to coat balloons
for jubilant piñatas. The wedding of the gross sons
of the dauntless with the bucket seat, the hooked brassiere
and uncertain drunken memory of Sunday services

and hygiene classes slept or stoned through.
Or the mystics with their tunnel vision
and their teeth aching and porous like old sponges
dipped in boiling water, charging like credit cards
for vision at the airport at the chain-link fence:

the musky shrubs and maples electrified
by the fireflies deadly ritual of fuck,
galaxies in instants, beach-front property
or construction left overnight, the brain
will find a pattern for the random blinking

and the cranes and bulldozers, alive one moment
and then fossilized like dinosaurs in the thick, wet heat
while my back is turned against the brick wall
of the Amoco, my pants around the ankles,
and my ankles pushing, jittery and loose, up and out

against my fist, my friend pretending to be mouth,
and the dying spiders in the windowsill stir
the stagnant air around their ends, the altar
of his love, for him that has deserted, for him
that waits to tell me of his conquest in my name.

SPLINTER

There’s something in my eye. A sliver
I have seen, close up, with both eyes turned
into where the mirror, mottled with a myriad
galaxies of spit and toothpaste fall away,

beyond the mercuric glass a clear
and undiluted air. Beneath the lashes
that were, for a boy, too long, pushed up
from the white enamel egg cracked with pink,

to look, first, into my own eye—
gaining upon a forbidden city
above a frozen estuary. Where the moat around it
snatches at my vision with ten thousand

blue and tangled knives, opening and closing

from the edges of the waste, and there, there
is the chalice of the golden shred, floating there
in nothing, darkness of receiving, and to reach

for it is nothing, and to crawl backwards
to be pierced. The sun made this and melts this.
There are old men in there, swimming and shouting
at the stranger dangling, cross-eyed, from the ledge.

THE CAMELLIAS

Crumbling. Flowers burning. Stinks the air with dying paper
dripped with pimp’s perfume. Detweiller pulls his forepaws back,
raking the scarlet neon onion of the smoking black camellia.
His collar jangles. The paper girl ducks from the errant Frisbee,

smudged with inert information. An old man stands,
transfixed, kicking the newspaper rolled in its plastic bag
with the dented loaf of his steel-toed boot. The trees
creak with the pale pink chip of Mars

blinking in the indigo of their longing. It takes the branches
decades to touch. Or the men in their yellow hardhats
crawl up the roadside in their yellow truck, and our dogs
admire them for us with familial warnings. We watch them

from these windows which they see as darkened, and to us
remain oracles of rush and color, simultaneous
but aesthetic warnings framing us a perfect tense.
We want to warn the men of gravity, electrocution,

but it is the leaves we love, the scattered branches
and the twigs, the snow from them, the rain. The knowledge
of their falling is a carnival of birds and squirrels,
spectators stupefied by the scratch and scramble

of our fluffy cousins with their scab black eyes.
We see them pick the tree nuts up, baby blue packing peanuts
flown to pad their nests. We want to warn them
from the complications of their tools. We need

to see them in ourselves, up there in the red bands
of the setting sun flashing in ozone and luceferin
beyond the weathervane, as the dogs become distracted,
by the dizzying flakes, the petals, some devoured

from their insides by the creeping red light
of the cinders' hunger. There is a hand, somewhere in Italy,
that should never touch this shirt. There is something cold
crawling up my arm. My eyes are salted shut. Camellias. Fur.

FOR THE WOMAN AT THE END OF HER MADNESS

There is something I would show you if I owned my feet.
A box of sandalwood engraved with silver plate, scratched
and lacquered with scenes of a river god's childhood.
We have all been tricked, and the boy has one

secret compartment, and it holds one tool. The comb
is gold inlaid with chrysoprase, its handle curved
around its triangular teeth of turtle shell,
Jack's last bean. Summer's brown hairs tugged from it

were strong, and fell away into the summer air,
but now, it is a mouth choking with gray bristles.
The volcanoes of your body cold. The scarecrow
gobbles the Cyclops' armies of the sunflower, thrashing

the stalks for love. In you, winter nibbles the wings
of the eider-geese, touches the hill with smoke
from a hundred lanterns. Islands drown in calypso music
and the howls of leopards mangling the yellow-eyed

parrots swinging in their bamboo cages from the street-lamps
of the mountain city. We are all one baffled
warrior living what's seen in the facet of the fly
descending down to us. The paths that curve

downhill to the icthyarium are crossed
with footprints of the mummies desiccating in the frozen sand.
The wind has leapt into the tracks and followed them
backwards to their mothers through all the hurt that happened to them.

MICHAEL BURNING RAGS

The wind is full of what
ten billion jungle trees
exhaled, spiders
lighter than their filaments,
seeds and oxygen, yellow
calling birds with green stars
mingled in their quills. Down-coast,
Chile bakes the bones of huge
marsupials beneath its chilly
mountain villages and planes

of alien airstrips. The sea. The Sea.
The sea, slate grate, falls in
upon itself, the electric nets
of its molecules glancing
off of themselves, the silver bodies
of the South Pacific fish. In
the sweet blue eyes

of the captain’s underling
the fields of Norway cross
their arms against a violet sky
and the cormorant’s hunch

and crackle with news
from the windmills and the foreign
fields of the opium poppy.
The captain is always angry.
He has a snuff box
of bronze, a cutlass
dented into it, two leaping
porpoises, a sun with the moon
in its hood of arrowheads. His arms are thick
with effort as he bundles

the rags of abandoned sails
into oil drums, dousing them
in kerosene. Michael drops the match
in, and burning sweeps like water
over the cotton folds. Oily knots
of smoke curl into the first stars,
the moon with its faded face
of constant pain, jagged wings
that swoop to the tip of a cairn-
shaped wave. “Burn these,”

he tells Michael. Michael
who is so full of wild dogs
that he can barely swallow.
He watches Pietro sneeze
his Christmas kerchief black
with soot. There are sharks
in the dark, a dozen whales
whose swimming lifts the water
to the bottoms of the ships.
Beneath them, blind balloons

of fish-flesh whinny and twirl,
gizmos of spun glass
digesting amethysts. You could
go to them, drowning in a celebration
of carnivorous toadstools
with you as their foreign guest.
Where to rise and to sink down
in the hoops of the Spanish dancer
would be the same until you are curled,
or explode, from your blood vessels, out.

STONE NIOBE

Remember, the skins around these skulls
were thinner than the inner petals of the dahlia,
and fell away more easily. The wind, tossing the hair

over my shoulder from the back is cold
from running over the faceplates of the city's tombs.
Each strand holds a chain

sewn into my thoughts leading down
into stones. Kaskamedea. Planitus. Bylodion.
Martidian. Todixian. Andropiae. Zerfrixius—O cold

water collapse me thrice-ways,
wringing my memory from my skull, tears
burning in the nipples of this cold Niobe.

I am running the arrow
between my teeth, yellowed with inky fruits,
sweeping my tongue into the adder

on the polished shaft. remember
and kill me, serpentine, my moon bent eyelids
guide the green shark and the freezing scowls

of heads that slowly rolled to witness
in the mountains: the blinking opals of the eyes,
the mouth co0llapsing into to make

the cave with fangs of calcite
blossom. The lullaby of mingled ash. The gazelle
tapping their dew-claws on the mirrors

of the water, watching the slender legs
rising from the bottom to swallow theirs. They
freeze to see me, wolf

in the mortuary, stalling to leap
at the throats of the mourners. To taste
fresh blood and the muslin

of their veils. To taste the widow’s
fingers. To taste the eyelids of her children
as they blink before my soundless mouth.

DANDELION

Old woman in her prairie bonnet,
her face veiled in a bunched hem
from the wind, which unravels the ribbon
and sends her prayers, a hundred
white-haired women, naked
from the neck down, air
where the green housecoat had opened
to feet hidden in clover.

FLOODED GRASSLANDS

The strategy of green is commonplace and full of contradictions:
dirt poor, straggling when the sea is dragging back the stones
and shells and carrion it flung, unwanted on the land,
where the sand grew dark beneath it, filling

with the atomized metals of the water, absorbed, and then
evaporated from the heated sand, left crystalline and pale gray
when the tide has left it. Green is less like this than flame,
taking hold at seed and crawling upward through the soil

to shake its leaves into the wind to give the wind
the message, which is much like what a fire is: spark
and catch, catch and spread, transforming as it goes, the flesh
and unattended field, the workhouse and the shed

until at last everything is consumed in conflagration

and the rain, scared off by hisses made by it in scalding
grows angry and falls anyway, first spotting what it touches gray
then slapping it down, drowning it. The grass snaps, parts

as mariners might part to watch a shooting star
slam a burning hole into the deck between them, bends
as if in prayer, but saw the sentient it did not and did not
die, half alive in dry soil and in mud, the strategy was

the same as mine, or ours: we strive to live or strive
to escape pain. Unfeeling grasses survive, the libraries of its past
deep within them, everywhere inside them. While the lightning
bursts up, leopard like to bird, then birdlike into god among the clouds,

the grass is full of turning pages, filled with eager students
and the scholars of the sage drenched in sagacity,
waving off the upturned and vacant eyes of the learning
as they tug, tug at their robes. The long stacks are lit

by yellow candlelight. The gilt edges of the tomes are thick
with dust. Each disturbed mote collides with mote, catches
the light and sends it awkwardly aside. Particle
into particle in play exactly like creation.

THROWDEAN

I.

Throwdean shook the biscuits cooling in their tins
below the window filled with April, which for him
was gray ladies napping in the goldenrod and grass
below six crabapples and the smudged
glass pressing the daguerreotype against its frame:
Biscuit April Morning on its nail. Throwdean
felt the chill of sweat evaporating in the gallery's
central air. He bit the hangnail from its thumb
and sauntered in blue serge through white planes
swinging his hammer, nail iron still tangy on his uvula.
Everywhere the sun is, Throwdean hoists his lens:
Quincy Market, Marrakech, Antarctica, the slum, he was
a man who would have maddened with mercurochrome
but did not need to, which is sad. Throwdean
thinks this sad. Tomorrow and tomorrow, money

is what money loves and Throwdean nods it in
and gnaws his vegetables and foxes ass. He pins
his days down with his open mouth but can’t fall in.

II.

He sniffs the mirror near his favorite eyes.
He sneaks cocaine to parties in a Mylar cow
and milks it on the plateau of a frozen steppe,
mooing from his diaphragm. He sang All-State
two years running, counter tenor, but he smokes.
Careening through hushed villages he lost his innocence
for Papa Jerry when the coma took him far from him,
from so many empty summers. A Phish
is just not the Real McCoy. His spinal column
seemed a bit more precious than his brain.
He did not know her: July, or Tiffany. Astrid:
what’s the diff? They toked a bong
and boned each other’s boxers. Close enough.
He could brag of it, and drop her, staggering to Dad.

III.

Throwdean is a lad at sea in paper ships:
one at each foot, dragged behind two gallant drakes,
indigo, ribbons tied in bows around their necks
and reined to Throwdean’s pudgy hands.
Such a little sailor in white cotton, knickers
with the blue suspenders…crimson ribbon
at his starched white collar, and the cap!
Such is Throwdean that the sea-salt
ossifies like stars into his frosty curls,
unfurling behind him. He is nostalgic for
every heartbeat in the thunder drum
his mother’s womb was, and the songs.
But then, his heartbeat and the beating
of the solar and the planetary aortas deafened him.

He says*, My soul found my body gathering itself*
like raindrops condensing to cloud
in that warm brine night, and thought:
I like it there. I slipped between the cells
and waited for my corporeal being to convene.
The process. Is becoming. Blossom, Quest.
Deluged, the frantic miners pitch canary
sentries down and scramble for the pulleys,
calling him: *hey you, hey you*! Skunk water
blackens. Last breath, Throwdean in dream,
squinting out of slumber, Sandman cement
on the hinges of his eyes. Birth’s rest
cut in halves. Escape. The gift of air. Umbilical
and bald, his wish to be an old man suffocating.

Toward this: dripping succulents border a tomb,
songbirds tip the flower bells and twitter
garrulously. The dusk sky thickens with musk,
shades of lavender, fragrance, scattering fragrance.

The dauphin stands over their bones, his lips
tormented by the wings of sleet that rap the hill
and splay his rags back, feathers of a balding bird.
He holds his hands cupped, crippled
like arthropods, crushed dead. Blue scavenger
the depths had caked with muck, pulled
from the rocks. He baked them,
made breakfast from their shells. Fat Griselda
humps the scrawny oarsman in the old king's barge
and lumps them, in cerebellum, in kits
of vice and homonym. *Tentacles of sea, coil back*
from shore and tug their rotted boxes to the bay.
Just die, just die, he begged, *the blind clown and the lanky sot,*
the miners mad in cackling, cold twilight, take
them all. Their names flake from the brass-plate plaques,
their parasites alive and lording in the tide,
dumbfounded, idiot and thirsty. Throwdean
crumbles, skipping, limp and falling, for the blood—
the water has made gut-sacks of their bodies
and they burst, rot into water, water crashing, lips
of anthracite and gold. Introducing Throwdean to his flesh.

IV.

You could be anyone. Of course, you notice him.
He speaks at you as if you should be taking notes,
or mental snapshots to be shuffled wistfully
in your old age. You could have watched
TV or gone to bed. Such is the life of you.
You could have been a magazine, or frozen food.
Smell him on your fingers, which would burn
your pupils should you rub him in, like peppers. Smell
the things he giggles as he poses, pummeled
by his clothes, thrown off dramatically. *I am*,
he says*, this and that, done here, gone there*,
a polar bear's ennui on the ice-floe of his middle age.
Yet: fascinated by the blur of each concurrent day;
wept in fear with tweezers and Bactine: a deer tick
on his eggs. Shiver in the icebox of the bridal suite,
you'll tire of this or that, of him, before he's half undone.
Wish that you were lonely rabbits in an April of your own,
crabapples dropping on the road that stops the breakers of a hidden
cove. Atlantic, wild in ivory and jade, mutton-fat jade,
cloisonné sunlight on rose-hips tended by an ancient hat
and visor by the briar cliffs, and by the heavens

heavy with the great pink cities of the dawn.

V.

Throwdean loves the alabaster cat. He says so
in his email, sent to Whistle and Monsieur Wu,
to the Milfords and Eddy Printin, and the fair
Tim Digby, though Digby lies, a pile of bones

in a flannel shirt buried
in a makeshift grave beside a frogging pond, though
all its frogs have caught the fungus and have died
and dried up, just like Digby. Throwdean loves

the forgery of the thing, the ridges of its white stone spine
that one might drag a stick along to mimic
frog songs in the confluence of a mariachi band.
One has to love one thing, if only in oneself,

or madden at the planets hiding in their bits
far beyond the sun, our unknown companions
playing hide and seek, but who is hiding
and the one searching is perhaps an open

question. What a funny little cat, its labial paws,
its chiseled whiskers filled with indigo, its
pure green eyes of glass, who cares if they
are not amethysts? Throwdean fingers its sharp ears,

slides one finger down its sloping muzzle,
stops a a second on the red glass ruby of its nose. Sad
and ancient Throwdean in his kitchen counting
red lightbulbs, sheets of negatives, the laundry pins.

He snaps the lengths of rope like heat pulls at the strings
of frequencies. They vibrate slowly down to still,
they make a handsome nest of snakes. Dear lord,
he cries, mysterious creator we now call the God Particle, singularity.

WEST

I.

I wake amid the undulating silhouettes
of hawking widows of the Falun Gong, three days

out of hiding from bad press in free papers. I don’t know
if my fingers holding down the paper

have been blackened by urban dirt or sun.
My forearm, face, the strip of skin along my back

where my shirt pulled free are burned, and burn.
My feet burn and the skin’s rubbed raw. I flinch

and cry out, thinking it has slipped off. My knuckles swell.

New wounds shaped like places sunlight healed.

My molars ache. If I had a quarter, I would rub my fingerprints
and face off with its edge. I eat what doesn't scare me

and dream the shadow of a tree house. To have nothing
divide us but our light. Our bodies engines. Quiver

and relent. Gruff voices orbiting. I never
touched his face. I never heard the rumble

of his heartbeat on my backbone and his breath
against my ear: wharf rats chasing mice among the crab pots

and the paper bags. The sunburned woman with her bible,
reciting verses while her vodka gallon rolls downhill

toward the street. The moon,
the sterile wheel, and the evening star.

II.

I weep beside the sea, which brought me barks
of seal, flat black stones, ice black undertow and salt.
The first slap takes my feet and the second

scrapes my shins. I come too early. German couple
with their daughter, dark girl weaving shawls from sand.
I'm sure the dirt, to her, is gem and clean. Two men

in ironed shirts and artificial tans lope up the sea wall. I watch
to see them touching, but they don't. My ribs squeeze.
Too drained to be confused, my thoughts

are few: I am bitter for the blessings of accidental pain,
nor is there providence in waste. It's waste. The scavenger
is vulture, opportunist, fooled by the flicker

of wax paper in a grate, by cigarettes
burned to the filter so still that it seems
a perfect paper cylinder. Nicotine

is more charity than bread. An old fist shaking at me: Go.
In drug and drink, in feed and fuck, this missing man.
At four, a well dressed woman flings out paper bags

of one thin corned beef sandwich, made with white bread
and yellow mustard from a Catholic rectory. Not
a pear, a vitamin, not milk. She looks above me,

like the law. There is nothing like a napkin,

but the food is free. It comes flattened in brown paper
like a schoolbook, or pornography. It must be from God.

III.

I open up my fat lip for the penny, scratch my balls,
expecting to be freed. Girls whisper for my fingers

in the blue musk beneath the Metropole. To be folded
in the striped sails of commercial ships,
my ascendance a sea, a storm, hit from the north. Where

sheets of rain cascade and fill with blue light, seabirds
crackling, caught mid-air unawares. My mouth a muscle.

My body dressed no longer plain to be a screen. A clean
white cloth on which my hands flicker, flare, then fly off
from the masts of painted ships to be forgiven for. I can

be tasted, touched, heard in the abstract like the blues.
I can be dumb in mingled moans and plucked steel strings.

Find a patch of grass and dry up in the sun, be a windblown
bag, a string coiling and uncoiling in the cedar chips
beneath a hollow tree. Abandoned parcels and receipts. Find

the harbor where there are only three
sides to be caught from. The lighthouse scattering

the Pacific with its basketful of fog. Found. I waded,
new to water, timidly in cold. Lumbered back to land. I rinsed
my cracked and stinking shoes, that bite me, in that sea.

IV.

At three, wheelbarrow rumbling bales of newspaper.
Insomniac pigeon picking through upholstery, soggy

plastic sacks of empty bottles knotted closed. The oasis
of a nickel glinting pewter by a wheel. Hill of a sleeping

man in soaked fatigues. For him, a heat-stroke dream:
Egyptian constellations, the buried

battalions of red ochre dynasties. Cough. Now, a dime
is something to be dreamed of: winged from the temple,

blackened at the edges, Elsie Moll stamped flat in silver. I am
an old man’s forward face, pressed flat in zinc

with copper vitals. A doggy swan. I am a taxicab,
mortally wounded and twitching in a cloud of blood. The others

circle me, their dorsals shining, shining—
deep inside them there is little chatter as they turn,

turn, cradle me in whir and forward motion, down
through grottoes of industry and parking ramps, squad cars

and policemen in the dark, their faces lit green
from monitors beside the steering wheels. Away

they carry me from danger. They set my dying engines
drifting to the bottom of the pawing sea. Above me,

the few and brightest stars complete their work and fall
like tumblers in to place. The moon just sun

refracted in a droplet, revealing me: a man touched by vanishing hands,
alabaster fingers and bone-white knuckles, pocked like dice.

V.

Shaken from the hand, the sand and salt, the stones,
the ocean: take me. Seethe and rock, marine and foolish drum,

see—we're the river. Out. If only I could shake
and breathe with seals, breathe for the seals the spray

and in their black coats all the white lights of shore houses
blurred into a moonlike sheen. See—the seals

feel moons spin into orb within their coats, they feel
the heaviness of paws that fall upon the stones,

the sad exchange of darkness and the liquid clang of bells
for air and its evaporation of the water from their beards… Fall in

the gravity of land, the groan or is it bolts
creaking in the ballasts of the show-ships anchored near

this sad Chicago, New Amsterdam of fog and mid-March sunburn,
or the shelf from which the continent throws suicides. So close,

so close to where a porpoise leaps within its silver
increments of self, shines and whinnies, weeps and carries him

to stillness at the bottom where green galleons rust
and anchors, heralded in seaweed, mark the ending place.

Couriers drifting off, forsaken by the air, into the depths.

VI.

Blind man, I will teach you what the sun seems. So. Hold
your flat palm over flame. *I see*, he says, *two jellyfish fucking*

upside down, six tendrils each of soot rising upward
toward the air. Circular sting. Hold it there and long enough

you'll learn a hole right through your hand and then
the lesson ends with you snuffing the flame out

with your teeth. Whistle through the lesson.

VII.

I need you because I feed on what you throw away. I wish
I had a pillow, and a gun. I have come for him

this far. I feel erosion in the stones. I feel
the conifers shake out their pointed canopies
into the night wind for the moon, if only

there were many moons in purple, and we
the lords of Jupiter. Stars give light in sphere

and race the roof. Where are you? Where? My hands
a whorehouse where dogs drink from the laps
of drunk men spilled in rain. The old men hid

behind my hands, their red eyes lit stiff sheets, the sun
exorcised the beds. Flags—pet cemetery beneath the overpass

where I stood and prayed for him. I don't know why
continue but to feel his lips
tell me the truth. Kneeling at his feet,

my fingers hooked into his belt, breathing
winter from his zipper. Just his voice, for me, then

fade me, peel my sight back—farewell to starlight, map of the billionth year,
the second—stop. Book, close your white wings around us
and the spine break, and our spines snap, and we sleep.

VII.

To flower in the sea like shells and scales, as the sun
declines the sky. Rocked in the salt

above the canyons, transmitter stumped, reflecting,
surface sheer to haunt the handful of seawater

twisted in the color of the chemicals. Bridges seen

as strings of candles hung from tall poles over water.

All things inverted, crushed, a stranger
reeks with the poverty of being. His shadow surging up

and seeping into holds of endless dark. Stars underneath his feet,
below the catacombs of earth, the great mad wheels—

my life. Have you hid it? A thing I could call mine, crawl into, just
to hide. To hurl into the water if I wanted. The wind spinning the blurring
circle

from the round and smaller piston of a paper cup,
rolling like a gear. Whatever might fall into it

spills out again, left in as orbit, only refuse. See
enough, I say. Stop spinning. Stop… and to be stopped is crushed.

VIII.

Snow held out inside a hand
beneath a street-lamp's beam of heavy flakes,

and depths of falling snow. The helix

strings of August light descending
to lake bottom, funnel of amber light, funnel

of green light dropping down into the haze

beyond the flat paddle of an idle oar, and a spider
that could clasp a softball splayed flat on the water's surface,

low voices as the engine rumbles

into lower gear. Gasoline and mulched grass,
tap water spreading fans on hot cement. Pale blue in dust

and stippled black with motor oil. Deep voice of the foghorn…

IX.

Surrounded surf. The dark has dropped to shore a bridge,
hills strewn with evening settlements low beneath the waves

of gray and black: sky and cloud, tree line, hill, and the high beep
of the lighthouse, waiting for the wide embrace of curving docks

that never come. The uninterrupted circle of the lighthouse beam
of Alcatraz. Just for me the full white pulse when the spinning lamp

directly faces me. If I sit still, the man who followed me will sit still

behind the outhouse near the wharf club’s wall. If I walk into the water,

a patrol car’s headlights turn onto the shore road, stop for me. I want
to wash my body in the warm chance of the air, swim out

of my breath into the random wakes of sailboats anchored bobbing
on the obscured pacific coast of California. My fingers cupped

underneath the night, waves above the covert undertow. I cannot read.

I touch the knife. I count moths sated with light among the facets
of the broken glass. I have ten thousand eyes. My life is in your hands.

LITTLE DEATHS

The back door, near my bed, squeaks
closed, squeaks again, then
the tinny, hollow rattle of the screen door
falling into place. The super
should have changed the screen to glass;
I lean against the wall, half spent,
half mourning. What am I? I hear one car

on the main drag rumble by. I know
the clicking of the stoplights turning yellow, red,
then green, unseen by any driver,
meaningless and swinging in the last
November winds. I watch the cds

leaned against each other, now o now
I'm reading of the death of this medium, already?
MP3, *ad nauseum*. Those gorgeous, spare
spinning reels of digits, 1 & 0, yes & no.
I'll never understand. I lurch forward,
blow the candles out. I'll roll a cigarette.
I'll turn the tv on. Everyone
I've ever loved is someplace else. I know
the moon is out there someplace
being dust. I know
that the sun is coming and will fade
even the bloody nub of Mars. I know
exactly when to close my eyes

and think of you—how many, now? If only
I had known exactly what a little
boy I'd been. If only I had known
how true my soul had seen, what
a bright believer of keen sight. I'd brush
the ragged, swirling leaves
adhering to my coat, each one,
each one. I'd love you all again
in spite of everyone,
and let go, almost every time,
for you to find yourself in servitude.
This door, unwieldy as it is, unknown and warped,
awaits for you. The kiss for your returning
is manifold and strange because, so far, it's never been.

THE ACT

In the moonlight, in the glen, the three performers
wobble underneath their tricks. The moonlight
cold upon their shoulders, blue upon the frost and grass,
and the trees black against the slick of sky. To the left
the poodle woman teeters on her haunches,
her muffs and cuffs and tufted tail swing to and fro
as she balances a blue ball on her snout. And to the right,

the lizard changing patterns as he dances, pirouetting with the rotating

loops around his lizard limbs, hula hoops and smaller rags
he seems to know that he has dinosaurs and birds in him,
the potential to be frightful and fly. But he
is here, the third wheel in a circus act for no one. At the center,
the woman is a long and spindly thing, a web
of a woman in a long white skirt with jagged hems,
with hands like an albino, mutant spider whacked in half.
Each hand holds a long, disastrous stick from which

she, too, makes spirals from an unknown quantity of hoops,
each one a planetary ring wobbling on its axis,
each one told to me in time. "I am alive," I say,
and the woman never stopping, stops
to welcome me here to this frozen moonlight patch of grass.
"Why entertain me," I ask, when in morning
I will not remember anything of you?" She does not laugh, or weep, or sing.
The clockwork of the universe goes on, and silently,

surrounded by the trees. "Did you call me here
to kill me? The lizard hiccoughs and drops his tail,
which wriggles quickly through the frozen blades
for the safety of the bower. Monday night, Tuesday night,
Wednesday I come here, usually from some near-stranger's
darkened room, where I crawl on all fours and finally crouch
in some cramped corner to watch them sleep. Perhaps I am
the servant of the damned, perhaps a guardian of the dreamers

with their spastic eyes and half-spoken secrets in the dark.
Am I licking my forelegs? It barely matters to me
to know exactly what my purpose is. Is this an image
from an eight-fold eye?

THE TAILOR'S PLAGUE

Stitch by stitch, it comes. There are altogether
too many flowers, birds and trees. Too many larks.
Stitch by stitch, I color in the stop sign, the cement
road all rife with cracks, the cross-light with its warning

hand of red. There are bees in there, I know,
but they won't be set free by me. Here's a minister

on the brink of the sidewalk, waiting for a sign of his sermon.
There's a sunlight shaft that misses him complete. People
mingling for the bus, young and old, black, brown and white.
A little girl with a hundred beads swinging as she pulls
her mother onto the bus. A man with a box, stitch by stitch, it comes.
Flying through the air, the microbes and bacteria

all mean well, though they can't mean anything.
In the hem, I sit on the sidewalk and know
when I'm done, one of these things will kill me,
I don't know what. I don't know when.
The August sun and pale afternoon moon
and the busker playing the harmonica, how can he be

anything but shelterless, there is no change,
no prompting in his guitar case. I lived
once with no shelter, what of it? Down
the street an ambulance is whining and flashing,
and veers toward me on the hem. There is a dog,
some kind of dog, it's not too clear

in the pattern of this textile picture of today.
Moths are batting against the light-bulbs
and the night comes, creeping in between the buildings,
the museum, the benches and the churches.
A hundred pigeons flutter into place.
I smile at them before I pull the stitches out.